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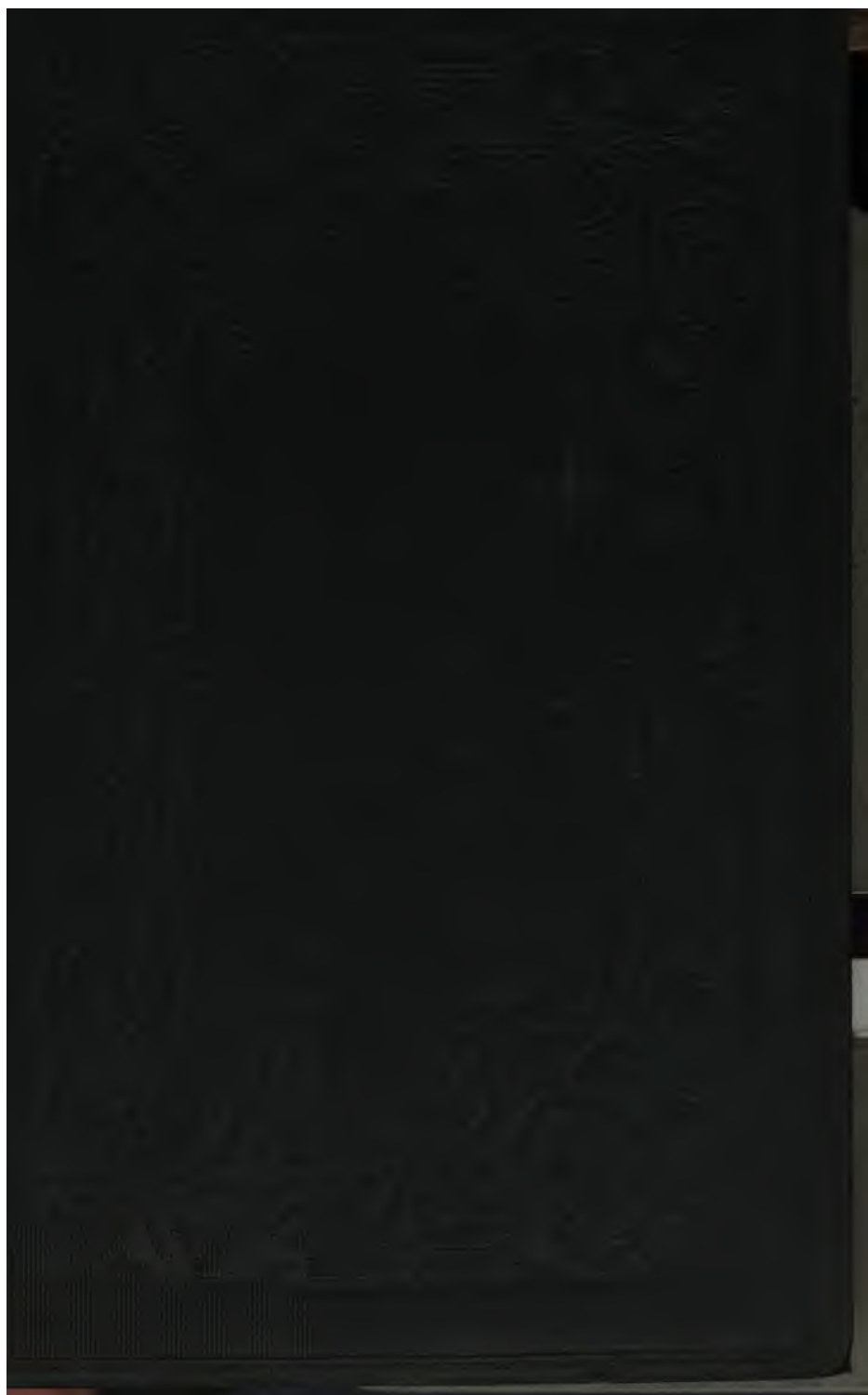
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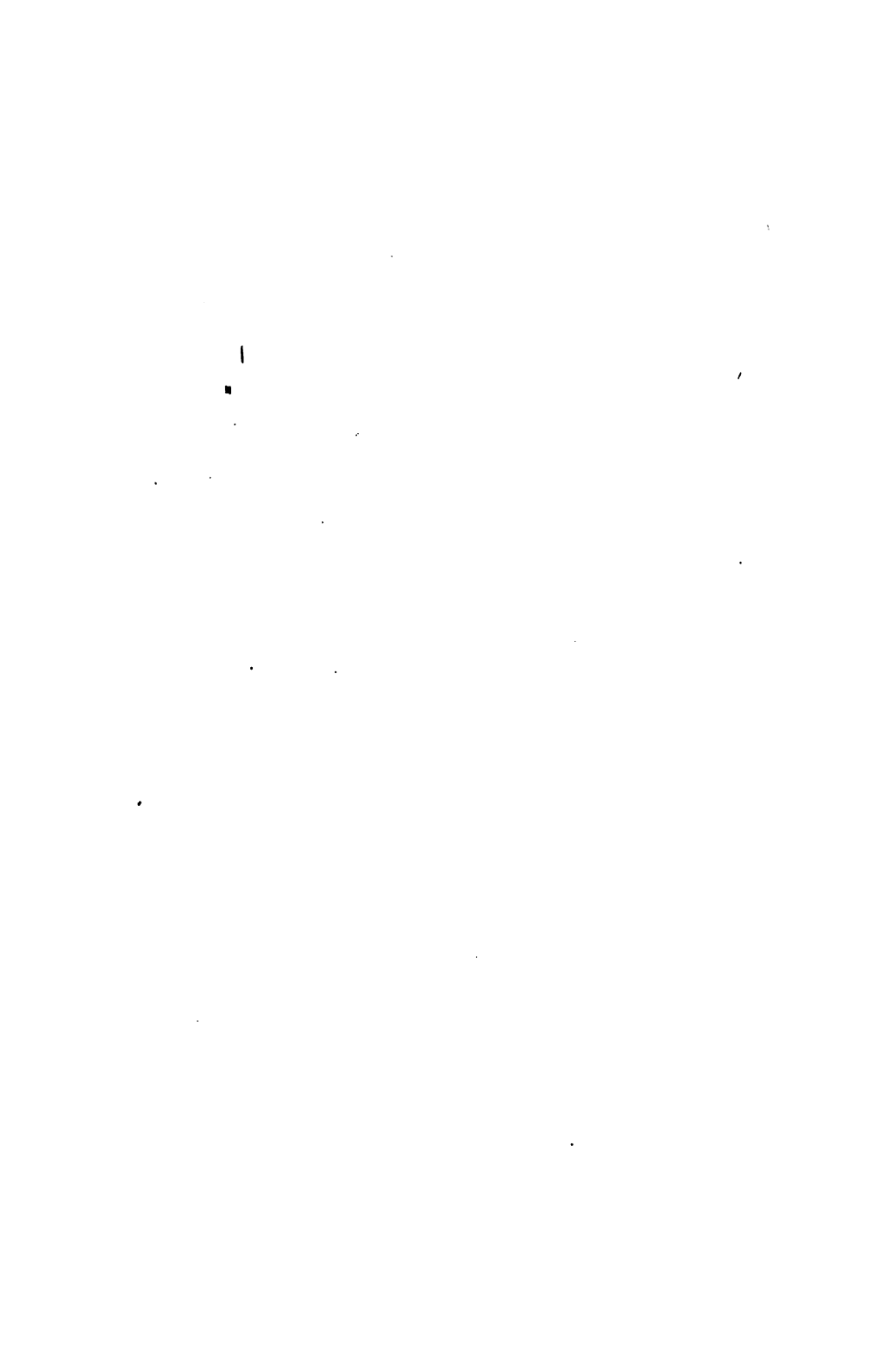
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MUSGRAVE

AND OTHER TALES.

MUSGRAVE;

A STORY OF GILSLAND SPA.

And other Tales.

BY

MRS. GORDON,

AUTHOR OF "KINGSCONNELL," "THE FALCONERS," ETC., ETC.

"The common growth of mother Earth
Suffices me——her tears, her mirth,
Her humblest mirth and tears.

"The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
I shall not covet for my dower,
If I along that lowly way
With sympathetic heart may stray,
And with a soul of power."

WORDSWORTH.

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MUSGRAVE;

A STORY OF GILSLAND SPA.

CHAPTER XII.

"At length he took her hand, and pressing it,
And forcing through involuntary tears
A mournful smile affectionate, he said,
Say not that thou art friendless while I live!
Thou could'st not to a readier ear have told
Thy sorrows. —————

This day,
Lady, prepare to take thy lot with me."

Southey.

LEWIS GRÆME had spent a night even more sleepless and wretched than Mary's; and not, like hers, succeeded by a refreshing, though short, repose. Worn out by vain attempts to sleep, he arose soon after sunrise; and remained for a long while

after he had dressed, seated by the open window of his room, in the equally vain hope of finding the fresh, sweet air relieve a rending headache ; till at last feeling the necessity for bracing himself against the coming day, with all its trials and painful emotions, he too quitted the house, some time previous to Mary's doing so, and followed the same path towards the river, which she soon after chose. Pursuing its windings where it overhung the water, at the summit of steep banks, covered with coppice wood, interspersed with some fine old trees, he came to a rustic seat, which had been erected under one of these, and placed himself there to endeavour to arrange his thoughts, and consider how to act in the new and most painful position into which Mrs. Clarkson had brought him.

It is only doing justice to the young man to say that an idea derogatory to Mary, or a thought of suspecting her, never crossed his

mind. He had known her too long and well; their mutual affection had been too long and firmly established, to admit of this, even had not his natural temper been one totally unallied to jealousy or suspicion. Nor could he, on calmly considering the whole circumstances of the case, bring himself to believe in Mrs. Clarkson's figment of Musgrave's intentions with regard to Mary. The insinuations of Hetta Milsom, after the first surprise and shock of them had passed away, he would soon have dismissed from his mind, as unworthy of farther thought, had they not been followed up by her aunt's studiously-calm and business-like statement of her opinions, for Hetta's were so manifestly dictated by personal jealousy and animosity, as to render her testimony worthless. Her only motive, in fact, had been pique at her cousin, and a desire, if possible, to create a coolness between her and Græme. She had no wish to see her achieve a handsome esta-

blishment, even at the price of breaking her first troth, while Mrs. Clarkson, with such an end kept studiously in view, was of necessity more careful of the means she employed. Still, the longer he thought it over, the less could Græme believe it possible that Musgrave could be acting such a part. Candid, clear-sighted, and reasonable, alike by mental constitution, and by careful mental discipline, his was not the mind to be hurried away by passion or suspicion; and reflecting on Musgrave's manner to himself, not less than to Mary, and on the tacit understanding of his own engagement to her, which had seemed to exist between them from the first, how could he reconcile the idea of such deliberate treachery with the character and sentiments of a man like him, on whose every word and action the unmistakeable stamp of sincerity was so legibly impressed? The very tone and look with which Musgrave had addressed him on the previous night,

carried with them an instantaneous conviction of his perfect truth and honour, even in the unhinged and bewildered state of his own mind at the time. With the instinctive freemasonry which exists between two high-toned characters, Græme understood, and did justice to his presumed rival; but the same nobleness and *loyauté* of nature which enabled him to comprehend Musgrave's, unfitted him to understand Mrs. Clarkson's. It was impossible for him, as it had been for Mary, to conceive the crooked manœuvres, and implied, if not actual falsehoods, by which that lady had, as we have essayed to describe, managed to get up the reports concerning her niece, which she had repeated in such exaggerated terms to Mary and to him. And thus, the principal subject of distress and anxiety in his mind, as in Mary's, was the existence of such injurious reports, the implied tampering with her name in a manner so offensive, and the cruel

handle for future taunts and persecution of her on the part of her aunt and cousin, which he foresaw as the too probable consequence. He could not but rejoice, as matters had been represented to him, that the period of Mary's stay at Gilsland was nearly over; and yet his heart sank within him as he reflected that with its termination, their brief time of intercourse must also expire; and that for a space, on whose indefinite duration it was impossible to reckon, but which could not fail to be a long one, they must again be denied each other's society, and condemned to solitude of heart. Had Mary been in a happy home, he would have felt it less, infinitely less, painful to part with her; but to picture to himself what her life would be with such uncongenial associates, whose tempers likewise had been of late so much embittered, was almost beyond his fortitude. Græme's was one of those highly-sensitive dispositions which, when united, as in his

case, to a delicate physical organization, predispose their possessor to depression and anxiety of mind under trial; and one of his greatest and most constant efforts was the struggle against this tendency to faithlessness, incumbent on a Christian. The invaluable blessing of those mental habits consequent upon an early training in sound Church principles, of order, submission, calmness, and self-restraint, had, under Divine Grace, enabled him in a great measure to subdue it; but the original tendency remained, as all human frailties do remain, requiring watchfulness. And on the morning in question he was less than usually able to contend against it, from the exhaustion caused by a sleepless night. Plunged in a melancholy reverie, he had remained, how long he could not tell—but were hours measured by thoughts, it must have been for many hours—when he was aroused by a light touch upon his shoulder. An arm stole

round his neck, and he turned to clasp Mary in his arms, as she sat down beside him.

"Mary, dearest! out so early? How is this?"

"I could not sleep, Lewis. I have been so unhappy. Are you better, dearest Lewis? Are you quite well to-day? I fear not; you do not look so."

"I am quite well, my own Mary; but I have a great deal to tell you; and we shall be uninterrupted here," said Græme. "How glad, how very glad I am of this meeting."

"And so am I. I have so much to tell you!" answered Mary. A mutual disclosure followed, unreserved on either part, except that neither could bear to repeat to the other the full extent of Mrs. Clarkson's coarse indelicacy with respect to their engagement, and Mary's worldly prospects. But however softened her account of her aunt's language to her, Mary had never before seen Græme so indignant or so much

wounded; and although, to her unutterable relief, she found him completely disposed to agree with her as to the utter absurdity of the allegations respecting Musgrave, she could not avoid perceiving that he was disposed to blame the latter, for having, however unintentionally, exposed her to such animadversions as he had been told of.

"A man of the world, Mary," he said, "a man who knows what society is, and what watering-places are, ought not to have acted so. See to what his attentions have laid you open! He ought to have considered that."

"Dear Lewis! the attentions of a father to a daughter. The attentions of an old friend of Mamma's family! Would it ever have occurred to you, or any one in his senses, to have construed them in any other way? I am sure it never would but for this most cruel interference."

"I do not think it would, Mary, I confess;

and yet you see that people, who certainly are in their senses, have done so, by your aunt's account; and have it in their power henceforth to say things that —. It is torture to think of it! All will soon be at an end now; and after this, I dare not regret it; but then we cannot shut these persons' mouths."

Yes, but we can be conscious that they have no real grounds for any such false and silly allegations," said Mary, and that is much, Lewis. When a thing is palpably and ridiculously untrue, surely it is beneath one to care for it."

"And is it beneath me, Mary," answered Græme, drawing her close to him, and clasping her hand in his, "to care that when you leave this place, where your innocent enjoyment has been so cruelly poisoned, you leave it for such a home—leave it to be exposed to what I know you will be—to the indelicate taunts of that—of

—Mrs. Clarkson—to the insolence of that girl, whose shrill voice is still ringing in my ears? You will be exposed to all this, and more of which I dare say you have never given me an idea; and I, who would die for you, shall be far distant, and unable to help or release you.”

“You are able to do much to help me, dearest Lewis,” said Mary, smiling through the tears which had started to her eyes.

“You can love me always, and write to me, and endeavour to keep up your own spirits, in full assurance that I can bear a great deal whilst I have hope and your affection left; and also that I shall have less to bear after the very first than your fears lead you to think. And ——”

“And I can take shame to myself, when I remember your brave, sweet spirit, my own Mary. You always were so much better, so much nobler in your meek endurance than I!”

More, much more passed between them; but at last Græme discovered, on consulting his watch, that it was past eight o'clock, and as the breakfast hour of the hotel was nine exactly, they could not have much longer time to linger where they were.

"We must soon think of moving," he said. "One thing, Mary, dearest, I want to say. You have not engaged yourself to go with all those people to Naworth to-day, have you?"

"Oh, no, Lewis," exclaimed Mary, colouring deeply. "I had no opportunity of telling you before we came home yesterday; and last night I was looking for you to do so, when—"

"We will talk no more of last night, if we can help it," interrupted Græme, shuddering. "Well, then, Mary, don't let them entrap you into going. You can easily get off. No one will wonder. Let us have one last long walk together, when they are all

away. It may probably be the last that we shall have for many, many a day."

The blood rushed in a yet redder torrent to Mary's pallid cheek, as she raised her clear, mournful eyes to his.

"Dearest Lewis," she said, "I would give the whole world to be able to answer yes. But I cannot. I was looking for you last night to tell you why I must get off from this party." And in a few words she related to him the request which Musgrave had made for a private interview with her, and her own promise to walk out with him that day. "Lewis," she exclaimed, as her explanation came to an end, "why do you drop my hand?—why have you turned away from me? You are not angry with me, Lewis?"

"You do not mean to say, Mary," he replied, after a minute's silence, "that after what passed last night, you mean to keep this appointment?"

“How can I avoid it, Lewis? How could I possibly break my promise to Colonel Musgrave?”

“Your promise!” he exclaimed, in a vehement tone. “What right had Colonel Musgrave to exact such a promise?—to make such a request? What can he possibly have to say to you which can render it necessary that you should walk out alone with him, and expose yourself to the misconstruction of those malicious tongues—this time not without reason? You cannot and must not do it.”

“Lewis, after what has passed, surely I need not tell you that I would rather cut off my right hand than do it, little as I thought yesterday of making such an appointment with a man of Colonel Musgrave’s years, and one who has shewn me kindness like that of a father. It is not for my own sake even, so much as for the pain it will give you, that I shrink from telling you I *must*

keep the appointment I have made, though it has cost me dear already, in causing the first angry looks, the first angry words, that I ever in my life received from you."

"Mary, my darling Mary!" he exclaimed, catching her in his arms, and kissing away the tears which, in spite of her efforts to restrain them, were now streaming from her eyes—"forgive me if I have grieved you! It is not with you I am angry, Mary; you are only too pure, too single-hearted, too innocent for the cruelly unprotected position in which you are placed. And I, your only male relative within reach—your affianced husband, have a right to interfere—nay, it is my duty to do so, in a case like the present. It will be at a risk that I cannot permit, if, after such odious misconstructions have been put upon your reception of Colonel Musgrave's attentions, you persist in doing what he had no title to ask you to do. What could he mean by it? It is bewildering! I

do not understand it. I cannot reconcile it to the rest of his conduct."

"I can," said Mary, who had now regained her composure. "I have told you what he said—the assurance he gave me that if I would trust myself with him, I should see the reason why he made so strange a request; and I am satisfied to do so—for—"

"But I am not satisfied," said Græme. "If men wish to be satisfactory, they ought not to speak in enigmas. Why not explain to you at once what his reasons were?"

"I can quite account for it all," replied Mary; "but I must ask you to trust me too, Lewis, for a few hours longer, for I cannot yet tell you what I mean. If it be so, it will sufficiently explain to you his feeling an unusual interest in me; and it made me gladly avail myself of an opportunity like this for an undisturbed private conversation with him."

"I do not comprehend you, Mary," said Græme, fixing his eyes upon her.

"I know you do not, Lewis, but can you not trust me?"

"Trust *you*, Mary? yes. But whom else to trust?" He rose from his seat in agitation, and leant against the tree beside it. "You mean to tell me, that, in spite of what I have said, in spite of the peril at which you do it, you will persist in keeping this most unfortunate appointment? Is that what you mean me to understand?"

"It is, Lewis," she answered, in a low but firm voice. "And I think, when I tell you that my doing so involves the sanctity of a promise made to the Departed, you will no longer refuse me your permission. I cannot say more just now, but —"

"You have said enough, Mary," replied Græme, turning away with a deep sigh. "I leave you to do as you please."

At that moment the sound of voices was heard approaching from some little distance, and Mary started from her seat.

"Let us go before these people come, Lewis," she said in a low voice.

He made her no answer, but remained leaning immoveably against the tree.

"Will you not come, Lewis?" she repeated, laying her hand on his arm.

"I cannot, Mary," he at last replied. "I cannot meet these people at the breakfast-table to-day, remembering what I heard last night, and knowing what new food for their malice is about to be afforded them—I have not fortitude for it. I can place no farther restraint upon you after what you have said, but I cannot go with you amongst them. No one will miss me. I am supposed to be ill, at any rate."

"No one miss you, Lewis?" began Mary, in a faltering tone, "do you think I can go and leave—"

Her words were interrupted by a loud laugh a little way off, and through some intervening trees, the lovers beheld a couple

of young men, residents at the hotel, who had apparently been out fishing before breakfast. They were coming, armed with their rods and baskets, towards the spot where Græme and Mary stood, and the latter recognized one for the favourite "beau" of Hetta Milsom.

"Oh, Lewis! let us go," whispered Mary.

He turned away without speaking, and fervently pressing her hand, as he relinquished it, plunged down the steep wooded bank of the river, and was lost to sight in an instant.

Mary stood still for the same space of time, then, as she heard the beau and his companion coming close behind her, she hastily drew down her veil, and pursued her way back to the hotel, which she reached a little while before the breakfast hour. This was fortunate for her, as she would have found it impossible any longer to restrain the agonising burst of tears and sobs which,

upon her entering her own apartment, forced its vent from her wounded heart. Poor motherless girl, left to steer her own unaided course amongst the shoals and breakers through which others were so carefully piloted, in a world where "*le malheureux a toujours tort*,"—well might she weep! And well was it for her that amidst the hard trials of her youth, she had been early led to cast her burden there, where the weakest may find strength, and the heaviest laden, rest.

The breakfast hour came and passed away, and nothing was seen of Lewis Græme. Mrs. Clarkson "wondered whether the indisposition of which he had complained the previous night, was confining him to his room." Miss Hetta Milsom "'oped that he was not very *hill*," and glanced inquisitively at Mary. She had discovered that her cousin had been out before breakfast, and this circumstance, coupled with Mary's looks, and the absence of Græme, induced

in her mind the most sanguine hopes of the lovers having quarrelled. Some such idea likewise infused new life into Mrs. Clarkson, and led her, although quite unaware of the appointment which Mary had made, to agree without opposition to her niece's request that she might be permitted to remain at home that day, when the arrangements for the pleasure excursion came under discussion. Within an hour after breakfast, accordingly, a very large party started without Mary, who remained alone in the drawing-room, vainly endeavouring to command her attention to a book, while now listening in vain for some sound indicative of Græme's having returned to the house, and now nervously anticipating the entrance of Musgrave.

The latter, whose observant eye had instantly been caught by the altered looks of Mary at breakfast time, and who had scarcely ceased watching her during the whole of that

meal, had taken an opportunity of privately inquiring after the health of Græme from Thomas as soon as breakfast was over, and having ascertained that he had been out for several hours, began to be afraid of something painful between the lovers. It was evident to him that Mrs. Clarkson was manœuvring to make mischief, and some strange suspicions of her drift had begun of late to cross his mind, which, although dismissed as incredible on the part of one who remembered his former relation to her family, still pertinaciously returned, and were confirmed by many minute circumstances. He therefore felt more than ever thankful that the moment had now arrived which would make all clear. Entering the drawing-room then, not long after the house had subsided into quietude after the departure of the pleasure-seekers, he approached Mary, and reminded her of her promise to him.

“ I fear you are fatigued, Miss Ruthven,” he said, looking kindly at her, “ but a little walk this lovely day will do you good.”

Mary assented, bit her lip to restrain the tears which she felt swelling into her eyes, and left the room to assume her walking dress.

In a few minutes she returned, and now the hour to which he had so anxiously looked forward, at last arrived, and Walter Musgrave found himself alone with the daughter of Mary Charlton. Nor could he have felt his heart throb more keenly had he indeed entertained the hopes imputed to him, than it now did; as with a protecting kindness of manner, which went farther to soothe and re-assure poor Mary than any words could have done, he drew her arm within his, and led her out into the sunshine and sweet air of that beautiful August day. Few words passed between them, while they proceeded down the Well-walk, then reached the ford,

and crossed the stepping-stones, her hand in his, who could at that moment have believed that her mother, in her young beauty, had returned to bless his eyes once more. They threaded the narrow woodland path, and halting at the birchen bower, sat down upon the seat.

“Miss Ruthven,” said Musgrave, after a few minutes’ silence, “I must explain the reason why I have taken the liberty, sanctioned by my age, of requesting a private interview with you. I brought you hither for that purpose, because here it seems most natural to tell you all.” He paused, then went on, discarding as he did so, the shade of reserve and constraint which had marked his first words. “Mary Ruthven, a fortnight ago you were ignorant of my existence, as I of yours ; yet there is a tie betwixt us, stronger than that of blood, and here, if anywhere, it must assert itself. Here, on this very spot, forty years ago, on such another

day as this, I parted from your mother, then my affianced wife.

“My mother!” ejaculated Mary, clasping her hands together.

“Your mother,” he replied, “Mary Charlton, whose living image you are. I see her now in you. In me you see an old white-haired man, but then I was a boy; a boy in all things, save my love for her; and that had the strength and endurance of manhood’s feelings. Here, in this bower, she and I parted; here we exchanged our last tokens of affection; here vowed fidelity to each other. I left her; I went to India; the thought of her went with me, never quitted me. Day and night I had her image before me; every hope, every plan for the future was connected with her; for her sake I longed to accumulate wealth, and counted the days till I could return and ask her to share it. Yet, Mary, my love was all in vain! Here, at Gilsland, some years after, at the very place

where our last promises had been exchanged, another wooed and won her. That other was your father, and for him I was deserted."

Long ere he ceased to speak, Mary was weeping bitterly. "Oh! do not hate me!" was all she could articulate.

"Hate you, my poor dear child?" he exclaimed. "Hate *you*! Did you imagine that I had enticed you here to listen to my story from such a motive as that? Mary, as that Heaven above us is my witness, I never, after the first agony was over, entertained any feelings of resentment against *her*, and how could any such be possible towards you, her innocent unhappy child? No, she left me to a life of desolation, but it was grief I felt, not resentment; bitter grief for her. My heart too truly told me that in that fatal step her own peace had been wrecked as well as mine."

"Oh, true—too true! *How* true you little know!" sobbed Mary.

“My child, I know all. Nor would I—not for worlds—have opened the wounds of your young and sorely-tried heart, had I not ventured to entertain the hope of being permitted in some measure to heal them. I heard your whole history from your friend Mr. Mercer. From him it was I first learned that your—your dear mother—and I—should meet no more—until, as I humbly trust, we shall meet where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. I heard from him of all her sufferings, and of yours; of your filial self-devotion; the accumulated sorrows of your girlhood; your desolation, Mary, and your dependence. Indeed, as you know, I have myself witnessed much, and guessed at more of *that* misery—aggravated as it must be in your case by the uncertainty hanging over the issue of a well-placed attachment. I have been a silent, but a most deeply interested spectator of all, down to the painful circumstances of

last night and this morning. I did but wait until a sufficient degree of intimacy should exist between us to authorize me to say what has been the purpose of my heart ever since I heard your story. Now, dear girl, I will venture to say it. Mary, I am a lonely, a desolate man. I have returned to my native country to find myself solitary amongst my kind. There is no one left alive who has the claim of relationship upon me—except the distant cousin, a wealthy man, who will inherit my estate as heir of entail. I live alone; alone, if you refuse my petition, alone I must die; and it has been your mother's doing, that I, whose heart overflowed with love for her, and for all mankind, have lived thus, and thus must die. Mary, will you heal the wound which her hand inflicted? will you give me an object of affection?—will you be my daughter, and let me, as your father, bestow on you a portion of what was meant

for her; that I may see you happy with the man you love; and may feel that I have not lived and toiled in vain?"

"Oh, kind—noble—generous!—" faltered the weeping girl. "How can I take advantage of—"

- "Do not say the word, my child. I ask it as a favour. I implore it in your departed mother's name. This is no matter of chance. The hand of Providence has brought us together. I have been raised up to aid you in your orphan state, by Him Who is the Father of the fatherless."

It was long ere Mary could answer, save by her tears. At last, making an effort to regain her composure, she drew from her bosom a small packet sealed with black.

"I too," she said, "have a communication to make to you, Colonel Musgrave. This packet, the day before my dear, dear mother died, she entrusted to my care, and bound me at the same time, by a pro-

nise, to mention the subject to no one—not even to Lewis Græme. Above all, she warned me to say nothing of its existence to any of her own family, should I, as she too truly anticipated, be at some future time cast upon their protection. She told me to keep it always by me. It was addressed, she said, to one who had been her early and dear friend, but from whom she had been long and deservedly estranged. She had not heard of him for many years; did not even know whether he were still alive; but something in her heart seemed to assure her that if he lived I should one day meet with him. And if I ever did, as I valued her blessing, she charged me to fulfil her dying command, by giving this packet to him. More she was about to tell me, but her strength failed her—she fainted; and from that time—she could not—she—”

Mary paused, wiped away her tears, and collected her voice; then went on;

“From the moment that my aunt first introduced me to you, Colonel Musgrave, I felt satisfied that the friend of my dear mother was no other than yourself, though I little guessed at *all* the truth. Repeatedly I have been on the very point of saying something to you to bring about an explanation; and as often my heart has failed me, or some one has interrupted us. I felt, however, that I must not quit Gilsland without discharging my commission, as I would not have it on my conscience to have disobeyed mamma’s dying injunctions. I therefore gladly availed myself of your request for a private interview; and now I give you what her dying hands placed in mine.”

She pressed the packet to her lips; and Musgrave, who had remained with his eyes immovably fixed on hers, incapable of speaking, awe-struck and confounded by an incident so unlooked-for, received it from her in silence, and gazed for a minute on the

superscription. It was addressed, in that once familiar handwriting,

“To Walter Musgrave,
“Wansted Hall,
“Northumberland.”

He arose from his seat, moved a few paces distant, and leaning against a tree, tremblingly broke the wax, which had been sealed by the fingers of the Departed. The packet contained Mary Charlton's old Prayer-book,—the Prayer-book once given him in that very bower where he now stood; returned by him from India; and now, after so many years, restored to him on the same spot again! And along with it there was a letter, a few faint, trembling lines, the *last* which the hand of Mary had ever traced.

“Walter,” thus ran their tenor, “I address you from my death bed, and too well do I know your noble nature to doubt, that, if these lines ever meet your eyes, you will

pity and pardon her, who so deeply wronged you; but who has so bitterly suffered for her sins. It is not of myself, nor of the trials which I have striven to bear, as the meet punishment of my offences, that I have now to write. All that is past and over, and I humbly trust that my penitence has been accepted, through the Saviour of the penitent. I look back on the threshold of eternity, to utter a last farewell to the friend of my early days, from other motives than to speak of myself. Walter, you have charged me, by the love we once bore to each other, should sorrow and trial overtake me, to turn to you for aid; to you whom I had betrayed and deserted. Not for myself would I have done so, but the memory of those generous words arises before me now, like a beacon in a dark night, when I look at my child,—my good, my loving, my lovely child,—whom I am about to leave motherless, in a world where there will be

but few to befriend her. Walter ! if you ever receive this letter, it will be from her ; and I ask you, by the memory of the Past, and for His sake in Whose sight we all stand in need of mercy and forgiveness, be a friend — be a father to my child. Be to my Mary what her own poor father will never be. Receive back from her pure hand the token of our early affection, and let the thoughts it will recall plead with you on her behalf, and on behalf of the memory of her who was once your own

“ MARY.”

“ Mary, my child ! Now you are indeed my own,” said Musgrave, when, having at length mastered the overwhelming agitation which had seized him on the perusal of this letter, he returned to the seat he had quitted, and folding her in his arms, imprinted a father’s kiss upon her cheek. “ Blessed be the merciful hand which has brought us

together, and enabled me to fulfil this last sacred charge!"

A step was heard approaching, a shadow darkened the entrance of the bower, and Mary, looking up with a start and a thrill of momentary fear, saw Lewis Græme standing before her, pale as a spectre, his eyes fixed upon her with an expression of agony, bewilderment, and reproach, such as she had never yet beheld, and which chilled the very heart within her. But Musgrave in the same instant started from his seat, and was by the side of Græme ere he could turn away.

"Stay, my dear friend," he said, laying his hand upon the young man's arm, with an air of mild dignity which it was impossible to resist. "Stay, and do not, for the first time in your life, suffer yourself to wrong a heart which beats only for you. Mary, my child!" and as she tremblingly advanced and stood beside him, he joined

their hands together. "Tell him the whole, Mary. God bless you both, my children!"

He left them as he spoke; and the lovers remained to enter upon an explanation, of whose rapture it were vain to attempt a description.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Where, through groves deep and high,
Sounds the far billow ;
Where early violets die
Under the willow,
Soft shall be his pillow.

There through the summer’s day,
Cool streams are laving ;
There while the tempests sway,
Scarce are boughs waving.
There thy rest shalt thou take.”

Sir Walter Scott.

THE explanation of Colonel Musgrave with Mrs. Clarkson, which took place that afternoon, in his private sitting-room, immediately after the return of the party from their excursion, may likewise be left to the reader’s imagination. It would not be easy

to find words wherein to depict the astonishment of that lady at the unexpected turn which affairs had now taken, not unmingled as the emotion was with consternation, and something resembling shame. The latter sentiment predominated in Mrs. Clarkson's mind, when, relieved from the presence of the stern and stately Musgrave, in whose eye she read more than his lips gave utterance to, she had leisure to ask herself the question, what would all the Mrs. Grundys of the hotel say, when she should be obliged to confess to them, that instead of a wife, "the Nabob" only wanted an adopted daughter? What would they say,—or think,—when they found that she had been manœuvring to procure as a husband for her niece, the man who had been betrothed to her niece's mother!

As to Miss Milsom, her motives having been less complex than her aunt's, so her emotions on the present occasion were less

varied; and resolved themselves into pure and unadulterated jealousy and spite. These, however, she was now constrained to keep within decent bounds; but, all things considered, none of the party were at all sorry to see the hour approach for bidding farewell to Gilsland; though some amongst them felt that for them its woodland walks and streams must ever contain some of the sweetest and most treasured associations of their existence.

On the morning of Mrs. Clarkson's departure with her nieces, Lewis Græme, ere returning to his duty in the south, accompanied our hero for a few days to Wansted Hall, there to discuss more uninterruptedly the future plans which were now so full of hope and promise. It had been settled that Mary should remain with her aunt at Knutsbro' for a few weeks, and then return to Scotland to take up her residence with Mrs. Græme, until her marriage

with Lewis could take place. Musgrave himself, through whose agency all former difficulties in the way of this long-desired arrangement were now removed, was to repair to Yorkshire for the purpose of escorting his adopted daughter to Edinburgh; and thus redeem his pledge to Mrs. Beatoun, who had foretold to him that he would come thither to assist at Mary Ruthven's marriage. The precise time for that event, it is true, could not yet be fixed; but all things were so happily in train for it, that the remaining period of expectation would not be hard to bear.

Those who understand the ways of this disinterested world in which we live, will scarce require to be told, that spite and jealousy notwithstanding, the latter days of Mary's residence amongst her mother's relatives, in the character of Colonel Musgrave's heiress, were of a very different nature from the first; or that "the proud Scotch

cousins," hitherto oblivious of her very existence, became suddenly and intensely interested in her, upon her arrival in Edinburgh under these altered circumstances. This is not a pleasant aspect of human nature, and we gladly turn from it to contemplate the joy of those who had loved and felt for her in adversity, the affectionate family of her lover, the warm-hearted Mrs. Beatoun, and Mr. and Mrs. Mercer, in welcoming her back amongst them, now that those dreary days were at end. But what were their feelings, compared to those with which the generous author of so much felicity rejoiced in the long-denied blessing of affection, such as he had now attained, and thanked Heaven for the means granted him of conferring happiness on those who so well deserved it?

In the following year, soon after Whitsuntide, Colonel Musgrave bestowed Mary Ruthven's hand on Lewis Græme, at the altar of St. John's Church, in Edinburgh, where

the lovers were united by the most valued of their early friends, Mr. Macdonald, who, at their entreaty, had quitted his retirement to perform that holy rite. They departed for a few months' visit to the Continent, ere returning to enter upon a new scene of duty which had lately been assigned them. This was the one of all others which both would have chosen—the living of Wansted, vacant by the removal of Mr. Villars, to whom high ecclesiastical preferment in a southern diocese had been unexpectedly offered. The living was not in Musgrave's gift, but he had interest sufficient to procure it for Græme; and the best compensation which he could have found for the loss of so justly-valued a friend as the incumbent about to quit it, was afforded by being the means of establishing another there, whose high principles and devotedness to his sacred duties were so well known to him; and through whose instrumentality he might look forward to the con-

stant enjoyment of Mary's society as well as his own ; thus finding her marriage, instead of separating him from his adopted daughter, bring them into closer and more intimate union than under any other circumstances could have been possible; and enable them, each in his own sphere, to labour together as faithful stewards of the gifts entrusted to them.

Ere returning home, in order to assist Mr. Villars in his final arrangements for leaving Wansted, and afterwards to superintend the execution of many improvements which he projected on the Vicarage, our hero bent his steps still farther northward, in fulfilment of a cherished purpose of his heart. It was on a beautiful evening in June, one of the sweetest of that lovely season, that under the guidance of Mr. Macdonald, Musgrave entered the demesne of Blair Ruthven, and approached the burial place of the family, This, as is frequently found to be the case in

Scotland, was not in the parish church-yard, but within the grounds, in a spot of singular and romantic beauty.

It was a very ancient walled inclosure, which Mr. Macdonald informed him was represented by tradition as having been in some far-distant age, the site of a small chapel, the very trace of whose foundations was now scarcely to be discovered ; and the consecrated place of sepulture around which was understood to have been used in former days by one or two families, long since extinct, and of whom no monuments now remained, save a few moss-grown tablets in one part of the inside wall, on which some heraldic devices were still faintly traceable. For many generations back no race but that of Ruthven had been interred there ; and the old grey walls were covered within and without with inscriptions and monumental tablets to their memories—now like what they commemorated, daily mouldering to decay.

This burial-place was on an eminence, a green knoll covered with trees, situated at the extremity of a long, solemn glade, amongst the woods of birch and oak which surrounded Blair Ruthven, and climbed far up the hills that ascended behind the mansion, and which at this sweet season were carpetted with the blue-bell, the wood-anemone, and other lovely blossoms of early summer. The small stream already mentioned in this story, traversed the glade, and making a rapid circuit round this knoll, enclosed it on three sides. The lower branches of the trees which grew upon it hung far over the water, dipping into it here and there; and the dash and murmur of the current, as it chafed in its rocky channel, or rippled in some places more smoothly over a pebbly bed, mingled soothingly with the sighing of the wind when it stirred the woods; and with the low, perpetual rustling, like the wings of unseen spirits, which

whether the winds were abroad or all the air were calm, never ceased to come from the leaves of a screen of aspen trees, overhanging the eastern side of the enclosure. The very spirit of peace and repose seemed to hover over this dwelling-place of the dead, whose sanctity no ruder sound or stir of working life could ever reach to invade, whose precincts no careless or irreverent step ever approached to profane. Far among the woods it lay—far from any thoroughfare. No one was likely to seek it, save for the purpose of paying respect to the memory of those who rested there, as was the case with the visitors now slowly and quietly approaching it.

Pausing at the foot of the eminence, and looking round them to note the stillness and solemnity of the scene, the clergyman pointed out to Musgrave the exquisite fitness, whether resulting from accident, instinct, or design, with which the aspen had been

planted by the place of sepulture—recalling to his memory the ancient tradition which relates that our Lord's Cross was formed of the wood of this tree.

“ Beautiful,” he said, “ it is to trace the symbolism which runs through all nature, and which to the observant eye, transforms the commonest things of outer life, into types and figures of the hidden life within, and imparts to the simplest objects around us, strange and wondrous analogies, connecting them with the highest mysteries of our faith. The Aspen overshadowing the Grave! — ‘ By Thy Cross and Passion, by Thy Precious Death and Burial, by Thy Glorious Resurrection and Ascension—— ! ’ ”

“ How well,” he added, after a reverent pause, “ do I remember pointing this out to that dear departed friend, whose last resting place you have now come to visit ! ”

“ Here ? ” asked Musgrave. “ On this spot was it ? ”

“ Here, on this very spot, many long years ago. She stood almost where you are standing now. I could fancy I saw her now—often do I fancy that!—in her mourning dress, and weeping very bitterly, for she had come to visit the grave of a dear child whom she had lately lost, a girl, some years older than Mary. *She* was a little infant then, and the elder child was growing to be a companion to her mother, when God took her to himself. Yes, I remember how, as I talked, her tears gradually ceased to flow, and how fervently and sweetly she thanked me for the comfort I had given her. I spoke as one not unacquainted with sorrow, and that teaches us to speak to the heart.”

“ You were always her friend and comforter, in all her sorrows. Well do I know that!” said Musgrave.

“ It pleased my Master, I trust,” replied the clergyman, “ so to bless my humble efforts. To Him be the glory. She returned

the comfort, if it were so. Her friendship was one of my most valued privileges, while it was spared to me, and its memory is a pleasure now. I often come here to visit her resting place; and if I sometimes feel tempted to over-much repining after the blessing which has been resumed, I have but to think of her at rest—at rest from trial, from temptation, and from sin,—to check my repining. Now, my dear sir, here is the key of the enclosure, and I shall await you here. Do not fear to exhaust my patience; every leaf in this spot has some memory of the past for me, and I could linger here for hours, and fancy them minutes.”

Musgrave took the key, and ascending the steep path which led to the burial-place, applied it to the old rusty lock, which presently turning, though with some little difficulty, admitted him within their walls. An instant's glance disclosed to him the object

of his search. At the east side of the enclosure was the monument which by Mary's orders, and under the direction of Mr. Macdonald, had been erected during the past spring to the memory of her mother, close by the tablet on which her father had received that tribute of respect from the heir who succeeded him.

The monument in question was a simple cross, placed upright against the wall, and it bore an inscription equally simple, recording only the name, age, and death of the deceased, with the touching aspiration—"Requiescat in pace." At its foot was the grave, whose carefully tended sod had not yet fallen to a level with the earth around. On that earth Musgrave knelt, and pressed his lips to the turf of Mary's grave.

"It was not here or thus," he said, "that I thought to have met you again, Mary, when last we parted."

Tears, whose sources had long been dry,

burst from his eyes at the words, and he wept.

The evening shadows were stealing swiftly on when he arose from his knees, and from the long and fervent act of devotion which had succeeded that burst of natural feeling. He plucked a tuft of grass from the grave; and stood for one minute fixedly gazing through the dusk on the cross of white stone inscribed with Mary's name, fervently repeating the words—"Requiescat in pace," as he turned away.

"Farewell, my Mary!" such was the utterance of his heart. Your heavy burden is laid down, and you rest in the shadow of the Cross; whilst I remain behind, to fulfil my appointed work, and to discharge the duty which in the hour of its departure your spirit was permitted to visit me to enforce. So may we meet in blessedness hereafter, as I perform a father's part by the child whom you then committed to my love and care!"

He left the burial-place, rejoined his friend
where he sat musing by the darkening stream;
and slowly and quietly, as they had come,
they returned down the woodland glade.

FINIS.

A LEGEND
OF AN
OLD HOUSE.



A LEGEND OF AN OLD HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

"In the silence of my chamber,
When the night is still and deep,
And the drowsy heave of ocean
Mutters in its charmed sleep.

"Oft I hear the angel-voices
That have thrilled me long ago,—
Voices of my lost companions
Lying deep beneath the snow.

* * * * *

"O!—I fling my spirit backward,
And I pass o'er years of pain;
All I loved is rising round me,
All the lost returns again."

W. E. Aytoun.

THE wild, wet, stormy Christmas-tide of 1850 has now passed away from earth. It has gone with its raging winds, its drenching rains, its dull depressing fogs. Nor less

with its moral tempests, its tears of sorrow, its dead heavy weight of anticipation and despondency overhanging many faithful hearts in this divided land. With all these it has departed to the grave of the vanished years which have preceded it; the grave which in turn will open for its successor. Would it were possible to add, that like the storms which closed the old, and ushered in the new year, and which on this sweet eighteenth day of January have given place to bright sunshine, and almost spring-like mildness—the trouble, the gloom, and the anguish in the midst of us had also disappeared! Would we could say that the angry flood whose advances threaten to sap the very foundations of the Altar, in the realm of England, would ere long subside into its dark channel, like the swollen waters of that deep and rapid Dee, or the turbid sweeping billows of that majestic Nith, by whose banks I travelled yesterday! This, alas!

we cannot say. We cannot even dare pronounce that the flood has yet reached its full height—the appointed bound where its proud waves shall be stayed. Silence, humiliation, and penitence, for the national and the individual sins which have brought these dark days upon the Church, best befit us at the present time ; the foot of the Cross is our safest refuge until the calamity be overpast.

But there are some hours when the heart is weary and faint under “the burden and the weight of all this unintelligible world ;” —when the present time, with all its perplexities, its doubts, and fears, whether in public life, or in “the hidden sphere of joy or woe,” clasped by each individual heart, seems all alike dark and inexplicable by any skill of our own ; and when we experience the intensest longing to escape from it, to put it aside for a little space, and to turn the aching eye and the troubled brain, to the

contemplation of some period less exciting in itself, and invested, moreover, with that magical halo whose radiance hangs a softening veil around the Past. In such a mood as this, dear friend, who have asked me to write a story for you, has the request found me to-day. I am weary and sad when I look around, and I dread to look before. My heart is bursting with unspoken thoughts, and as I cannot speak them, I would fain lay them apart awhile. Let me turn for relief to the old memories which few, indeed, besides myself, few of those who shared them once, are now left to recall. Let me summon up the shade of a joyous Christmas time, many long years ago, and tell you a simple tale connected with a spot which I visited in my girlhood, and which I never have forgotten, though I believe you never heard me mention it before.

It was, then, about Christmas 183—, that a large and joyous party was assembled in

the old mansion-house of Findlarick,—a long way north of this part of Scotland. I, and several members of my family now departed, were amongst the younger guests; and under the superintendence of our host and hostess, a kind old lady and gentleman of the good old school, we spent a very merry Christmas, and one much more seasonable in point of weather than that which has just gone by. A succession of bright frosty days enabled the party to enjoy many out-door sports and many long bracing walks, the most delightful and exhilarating of all species of exercise. Some of these walks, enlivened as they were by the gay spirits and unrestrained converse of young happy hearts, have never faded from my recollection. I have forgotten things better worth remembering, but these scenes are indelible. How often since then, has one in particular arisen before me, with all the vivid distinctness of a picture! I seem again to feel the crisp,

hard-frozen grass crackling beneath our footsteps, as quitting a cross-road along which we were returning from an expedition to an old ruinous castle, at some miles distance, we entered an extensive wood, through which there was a footpath leading directly towards the principal avenue to Findlarick House. I could fancy that I again beheld the tall stems and leafless branches of the trees, still and motionless in the clear frosty twilight, that I paused again ere we plunged amongst them, and looked back towards the western horizon, all glowing in the red and orange hues of the recent sunset; the sky gradually deepening and darkening as it ascended, till far overhead it was of a clear profound blue, whence one by one the stars were beginning to look glimmeringly forth.

Again I could imagine that the silence and the dimness of the lifeless woodland scene, as we advanced still farther into its recesses, were stilling our merriment, and

hushing our speech into a lower tone ; till the spell was broken by the loud gleeful shouts of several boyish voices, a little way in advance of us ; and soon after, suddenly issuing out on an open glade of the woods, we found ourselves close upon a small circular pond, now frozen over, on which three or four lads, of whom the eldest, our host's grandson, was about fifteen, were in full career of enjoyment—sliding, skating, tumbling, as it might happen, and scrambling to their feet again with undiminished zest—shouting and laughing through all.

We stood by them for a few minutes, sympathizing in their glee, some of us joining them on the ice, and one presently exciting much laughter by measuring her length upon its surface ; till warned by the increasing obscurity, we all wended our way home together, the echoes of those merry voices borne far upon the calm frosty air.

Those merry voices ! Not one of them

all is now left to sound upon the earth. Of that happy party of boys, not a single survivor remains. It is, indeed, at times unspeakably startling, when, after the lapse of a space even so comparatively short as this, we are led by some such train of reflection as the present, to look back and to trace the after career of our early companions. Those boys who, though not members of the same family, were either kinsmen, or the children of intimate friends, were scattered far and wide over the earth, within a very few years. One died of consumption, in Italy, and his mortal remains rest in the English cemetery at Leghorn. One was drowned off the coast of Southern India, having gallantly refused to quit a sinking vessel until he saw every man of his troop then on board, safe in the boats. One—prematurely worn out and heart-broken by a vain strife with adverse fortune, sleeps beneath the Western Forests, in a grave hallowed by the tears

and prayers of many warm, though humble, Scottish hearts who were companions of his exile. One, the heir to a noble property, died in the prime of youth, of a brief illness, beneath his father's roof. And one, the last survivor of the band, fell at Aliwal. Whilst of the joyous girls who shared their Christmas sports, some, too, have been summoned to the unseen land, and if the lots of some of those who remain have been, as woman's lot is wont to be, less outwardly diversified, they have not, perchance, been marked by less of strange and startling vicissitudes connected with the inward life.

But enough of this mournful retrospect. It was not of that woodland walk I intended to speak, though its memory claimed a passing tribute, as it arose before me. I meant to tell you of another ramble, in a different direction; and of the spot to which it conducted us, and with which the little story that I have to relate is connected.

The day on which, escorted by our kind host, the Laird of Findlarick himself, a considerable portion of our party set out upon the above mentioned walk, was frosty, like its predecessors, but not bright and sunny as they had been. It was a still grey frost, undisturbed by a breath of wind, and therefore not intensely cold to those engaged in active exercise ; but bearing in its absolute deadness and fixed repose, overcanopied by the motionless fleece of small wavy clouds, which there was not the faintest breeze to stir, a certain character of solemn mournfulness, well befitting, as we all agreed, the last hours of the departing year, whose final day it was, save one.

The country through which we passed was in some respect similar in character to certain districts of this southern nook of Scotland ; and the points of difference between them not such as to be observable at that season. It was open, bare, and, when viewed

from a height, seemed level to the eye ; but in actually traversing it, this aspect was altered, and it was then discovered that its rolling surface, and round green knolls, ever and anon went sinking into deep glens and hollows, clad in many places with a low shrubby underwood, for it did not amount to the size of coppice, and down the rocky channels traversing whose depths, ran many small streamlets, now silenced by the frost, or at best murmuring low in the tiny thread of water, whose rapid motion had as yet kept it uncongealed, beneath its overhanging fringe of icicles. These glens and hollows were some of them abruptly terminated by steep banks, while others gradually opened out towards the sea, the great German Ocean, whose strong billows dash themselves against that rocky coast, and from which we were not now above two miles distant.

Still drawing nearer to it, we pursued our way along a solitary parish road, now sepa-

rated from the pasture or fallow fields on either hand by the indigenous and peculiarly ugly fence, "a dry stone dyke," or low wall of unhewn stones piled upon each other without cement ; now bordered by a stunted hedge, or by a fringe of desolate-looking alder bushes growing out of a piece of marshy land, or a wayside ditch, at present frozen.

We met not a human being, although we could descry one or two cottages, placed in nooks and sheltered situations, at some distance from the road, but none of their inmates seemed to be abroad. Nor did a sound of animated life reach our ears for a long way, save those of our own voices. The spell of silence and lifelessness, peculiar to long-continued frost in the country, seemed to have fallen upon the district we were traversing, at no-time a very populous one; and even the sheep feeding on turnips in some of the fields, and the cattle in others, were as mute as the rest of the animal creation around.

But few thoughts save those of enjoyment were in any of our hearts, as we gaily paced along, until at last our road, for some time very straight and monotonous, suddenly descended into a glen of somewhat more picturesque character, crossed the stream which ran through it by an old stone bridge, with a low mossy parapet, and again made a steep ascent on the opposite side. From this point it followed various turns and windings, until at last it brought us in view of the place which we had come to see, an old and now deserted mansion formerly a gentleman's residence.

"Here," said the Laird, "is the goal of our wanderings. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the Auld Place o' Glentrochet, as it is called in the country-side. An eerie-looking bit it is, now-a-days, but you may see that it has the remains of better times about it still."

It was, indeed, a somewhat desolate looking

spot, yet full of a certain melancholy beauty of its own. An ancient and dilapidated gateway opened upon the road, on which we now were, and was connected on either side with a low and ruinous wall, which enclosed, within a somewhat wide circuit, a small park, or rather paddock, planted with old trees, some of them of tolerable size, considering their proximity to the sea blasts. They were the only trees within sight. Stretching before us, on the opposite side of the road to the gateway, were green pasture fields of picturesquely-diversified surface, and ascending into steep craggy heights, clothed with thorns, sloe-bushes, broom, and whin; and where the road abruptly descended after passing the gateway, a small stream ran at the foot of the descent, and, for a little way, skirted the boundary wall of the wooded ground.

We entered at the gateway, now only closed by a rude wicket of fir branches,

clumsily nailed together, and found ourselves in a straight avenue of limited extent, and shaded on each side by fine beech trees, of which several still remained; while the moss-grown stumps disclosed where their comrades had fallen. A narrow pathway with cart ruts on either hand was all that remained of the road; the rest was overgrown by grass, as long unused. It ascended but slightly towards the house, which stood at its extremity, an old Scottish manor, of limited size, and of that description which is called "a single house," *i.e.* the space only admitting one room between back and front on each story. It formed three sides of a small court, the side buildings, however, lower than the middle, and only containing two stories, while the middle had three. Another gateway, where the gate had long disappeared, admitted to the court. The offices, screened from sight by a high wall, lay on its right hand, some little

way down the slope of the ground, which was all in grass about the house, that beautiful short turfy grass, so exquisitely clean and free from weeds, which is only to be found in land long sacred from the plough, and carefully tended; and which, whenever found near a dwelling-house, is a sure indication that the spot has seen better days, whatever it may now be reduced to. But as we entered the court, whose broken and uneven pavement was slippery with the frost, and evidently little trodden, an impression of gloom and dreariness ineffable was conveyed by the boarded-up windows above, and the closed house-door before us, which with its broken and moss-grown steps, seemed as if years had elapsed since it last had opened to any guest. It was, in fact, unused; and our guide, well acquainted with the localities, turned to a smaller side-door, at which his tap was presently answered by a buxom young matron, the wife of a herdsman, who

was placed in this old house to take charge of the stock upon the farm, it being in the possession of an extensive grazier, who lived at another place some miles off. Her husband, she said, was out, foddering the sheep in some distant fields, and she, with her two little children, sole inmates of the dwelling, of which we were heartily welcome to take a look if we wished it. So, carrying the baby, and with a little girl of three years old clinging to her petticoats, she proceeded to do the honors of her abode.

Of this but a very small portion was in her occupation, and that of her household. Her domain was limited to "a but and a ben," the kitchen, namely, of the old house, a boarded apartment entering from it, and a couple of closets. We enquired if we might see the other rooms, or if they were shut up? No, she replied. The windows on the other side of the house, were not closed, as the rooms were used for keep-

ing wool in, during the summer; and so she proceeded to conduct us, by a stone passage, round to the principal apartments, in the middle of the building. The passage was dark, from the closing of the window which had been wont to light it; and when, all of a sudden, she flung open a door, and admitted us into a low roofed, but well sized parlour, opening opposite to the front door, the contrast disclosed by its aspect to the almost squalid desolation we had just witnessed, elicited exclamations of delighted surprise from all the strangers present.

It was, or must have been in days of yore, a singularly comfortable room, panelled with wood painted white, and decorated with a scroll-work of elaborate carving all round the ceiling. The lofty mantel-piece, not far from the roof, which surmounted the large fire-place, lined with Dutch tiles, was also richly carved, in bunches of fruit and flowers, with grotesque animals' heads at intervals,

evidently, from the workmanship, the production of no mean artist; and on one side of this fire-place—that farthest from the door—was a long, narrow recess, one of those quaint, awkward-looking, comfortable contrivances, which imparted such a peculiar character to the dwellings of our ancestors, and which must once, when the room was furnished, and in daily use, have been one of the snuggest retreats possible. It was lighted at its extremity by a small window, looking out upon an angle of the house. Besides this window, there was a sashed door, glass half way down, at the opposite side of the room to the entrance; and it was the view from this sashed door, which with some little difficulty we contrived to open, that so enchanted us all.

In complete contrast to the gloom and dreariness of the front, this side of the mansion presented a prospect the sweetest and most peaceful that could be conceived.

The door opened directly into the garden, or rather, what had been the garden; which extended down a gentle slope, all along behind the house; and we went out upon the two steps which led to it, and looked round us. There was no great extent of ground—merely the remains of an old-fashioned garden of moderate size, with its strawberry-beds sloping to the sun; its plots of vegetables, and of gooseberry and currant bushes; its turfen walks bordered by rows of flowers; its sheltered corner, where once had stood the row of beehives, and where the herd's wife still possessed one hive, whose busy denizens must have found ample nourishment amongst the lingering sweets which in summer time still bloomed amid neglect and decay “to mark where a garden had been.” There were traces of a border of flowers, edged with tall box, all along below the house; and all over it, and round the projecting angles, fruit trees had

been carefully trained; and still, moss-grown and unpruned, "clung to the mouldering wall." We proceeded down a broad grassy walk which leading directly from the sashed door, bisected the garden, in the formal fashion of old days; and right in the middle of which stood an ancient sundial, by which the Laird made a pause.

"Look well at this sundial, ladies," he said; "thereby hangs a tale, if you did but know it."

He was of course immediately besieged with entreaties to unfold the tale; but in vain.

"Bide a wee, bide a wee. Hooly and fairly! One thing at a time, fair ladies. See the place now, and hear the tale after. I never tell ghost stories by daylight."

"Ghost stories!" ejaculated more than one eager voice. "Oh! do tell us!"

"No, no—nonsense! Keep it for the fire-side at night."

“All very well for you, who have your sister in your room, but what shall I do, all alone in mine, after hearing a ghost story at night?”

“Oh, pooh! you won’t mind.”

“Sha’n’t I? That is all you know.”

“Ghosts! Fudge! Who ever hears of such rubbish now-a-days?”

The latter enlightened remark was the contribution of a youth from a public school, at whom the Laird shook his stick; adding with a smile as he did so, some observation in an under tone respecting the march of intellect. Then, as it appeared to be settled that, in spite of the timorous damsel, the ghost story should be deferred to the legitimate season—night, we proceeded on our perambulation of the garden.

The walk we were following led us to its foot, where along the low wall that fenced it in, ran what had once been a grassy terrace, looking into the orchard, at a consi-

derable depth below. This orchard extended from behind the offices, all the way round the outside of the garden, from which a little wicket gate, close by the house, led into it; and with its old mossy apple and pear trees, its short grass, which looked as if in the spring it must be enamelled with primroses and daffodils; and the low, irregular turf fence which formed its boundary, it was as sweet a spot, even beneath that cold, grey sky, as ever I beheld. Beyond it again, the eye was led over a succession of low, green hills, in the hollow between which flowed the stream already mentioned as skirting the walls of the grounds, its course here and there overhung by a drooping tree; till at the distance of little more than a mile from where we stood, the glen opened out upon the sea, which terminated the view. There was not much in the scene; its accessories were few and simple; its general character bare and monotonous; yet it is

not easy to convey in words the impression of sweetness, tranquillity, and peace, which as a whole it left upon the imagination. Not in my words, at least, would I attempt to convey it; but it is exquisitely uttered in the following lines, which as we stood looking out from the terrace, were quoted by one of the party, then a youth, but who has since won himself an honored name in the field of literature :

“Needs no shew of mountain hoary,
Winding shore or deepening glen ;
Where the landscape in its glory
Teaches truth to wandering men.
Give true hearts but earth and sky,
And some flowers to bloom and die ;
Homely scenes and simple views,
Lowly thoughts may best infuse.”

“There are not even the flowers here, just now,” he added, looking round—“not even a snowdrop can pierce the ground in this relentless frost. It is all cold, still, and severe in barrenness ; and yet how calm—how full of deep repose—how soothing !”

“And imagine it in the spring, or rather in the early summer!” said another of the party. “Fancy those trees all clothed in their young fresh leaves, and the tender green of the new spring grass, full of blue bells, and daffodils, and narcissus, which one always finds in such profusion about old orchards and garden ground. And then the birds singing amongst the old trees, and the hawthorn blossoming on the bushes. And looking over to those braes, how sweet to see the lambs scattered about them, and nothing, not a living thing besides, to break the perfect solitude, except, now and then, a rook or two sailing across the white fleecy clouds; and the blue sky, reflecting itself on the blue sea beyond. If it is so lovely now, fancy what it must be then.”

“And then,” pursued the first speaker, turning away from the more distant landscape, and gazing on the mansion, “and then to withdraw one’s eyes from all that

prodigality of young animal and vegetable life, and material beauty, and fix them once more upon the old, grey, deserted house, there where it is standing, all unchanged, as it has stood for years ; to look at its windows, like the eyes of the dead, from which 'life and thought have gone away, side by side;' and at its untrodden door step, and vacant rooms ; and dream over all the thousand histories those rooms could tell, if they could find a voice! To think of all the tide of life, and hope, and fear, and sorrow, and joy, which must, in its day, have flowed within these silent walls! It is the *human* interest, after all, which invests the spot, that renders it so suggestive; 'Because that we have all one human heart.'

"True," remarked a third, and older speaker. "The material adjuncts derive a value beyond and above their own, from the associations linked with them. It is because nothing connected with that human interest

can ever cease to exist, though it may cease to be remembered. An awful thought it is—the tenants of that house for generations—where are they now? They still live—still reap as they have sowed in the body, though not now within mortal sight; and *how?* ”

“ Somewhere,” replied the future poet—

“ Somewhere within created space,
Could we explore that round,
In weal or woe there is a place
Where they may yet be found.”

And with the echo of those solemn words ringing in our ears, we retraced our steps, re-entered the house, by the empty and silent parlour, and having explored its remaining rooms, which presented nothing in any way remarkable, bade farewell to our worthy guide, and returned along the way by which we came, in a mood more subdued and thoughtful than that which had marked the first part of our walk.

That evening, when the large and happy circle was assembled round the huge old-fashioned fire-place of the drawing-room at Findlarick, a dozen voices were uplifted to remind the Laird of his promise respecting the ghost-story, and amongst these it was remarked that the timorous damsel's, notwithstanding her protestations of the moment, was not the least audible. The Laird, nothing loth, began his tale accordingly, which I shall presently relate in my own words, from my recollections of his singularly graphic narrative.

CHAPTER II.

"Do we indeed desire the dead
Should still be near us at our side."

* * * * *

"How pure at heart and sound in head,
With what divine affections bold,
Should be the man whose thoughts would hold
An hour's communion with the dead!"

In Memoriam.

Alfred Tennyson.

THE Place of Glentrochet, in former days, had belonged to a family of the name of Duff, by whom it had been possessed for many generations, along with a much larger extent of landed property at one period than there remained to their last descendant, an orphan girl, whom the deaths

of her parents left its sole heiress, somewhere about a hundred years from the period when this story was told.

In 1742, Miss Duff, of Glentrochet, then a blooming young woman of twenty-two or three, bestowed her hand and estate upon a gentleman named Randal Cameron, son to a cadet of the Lochiel family. He had been educated at Douay, according to a very common fashion amongst the Scottish Jacobites; even when, as in the present case, they were not Papists, but members of the reformed Episcopal Church; and the political principles in which he had been brought up precluding him from any employment under the Hanoverian government, he had taken foreign service; and bore the reputation of a high-minded man and gallant officer; when this change of condition occurred to alter his views in life, and induce him to settle upon his wife's property. There they resided in much happiness and peace,

until the landing of Prince Charles Edward in 1745, when Cameron immediately joined the Jacobite force, carrying with him almost every man capable of bearing arms amongst the tenants and dependents on the land. His experience of foreign warfare, and the fact of his being well known at St. Germain's, and having been at various times charged with secret missions from the court there to its adherents in Scotland, rendered him a person of much trust amongst the insurgents; and one whose presence could not well be dispensed with; and thenceforth to the day which closed his mortal career, his wife and he never met but once again.

That one meeting was during the period of Prince Charles' occupation of Edinburgh, after the victory at Preston, when his faithful adherent was dispatched to his own home on some private mission, and gladly embraced the opportunity of remaining there for a few days. The state of his wife's

health had not admitted of her joining him at Edinburgh, and she had remained at Glentrochet in a solitude which would have been nearly total, but for the consolation and cheering imparted by the frequent visits of a valued friend of her own and her husband's. This was an elderly man, Mr. Menteith by name, the pastor of a numerous Episcopalian congregation; whose modest chapel, as well as his own humble residence, were situated in a village scarcely two miles from Glentrochet Place. It will be remembered by those familiar with the history of the persecuted Church in Scotland, that although subjected to heavy penalties, and completely discountenanced by Government, since the first attempt in favor of the Chevalier de St. George in 1715, yet in the north, where her adherents were so many, and often so influential, she was so far under protection as to be connived at, and unmolested in the exercise of her spiritual

functions. A large majority of the neighbouring population were staunch churchmen; and amongst all of them, rich and poor alike, this holy, learned, and devoted man was held in the highest reverence. No greater comfort could have been afforded to Randal Cameron in the painful prospect of leaving his wife for so undefined a period, than his knowledge that in the excellent old clergyman she would at all times have a friend and an adviser; and long and anxious were the discussions which they held together during the few hurried days that he remained at home, on that as well as on many other subjects, with regard to which he desired to have counsel as well as sympathy from Mr. Menteith. On the night before he quitted the roof which he was never destined to revisit again, they were long alone together. Then Cameron, summoning his wife from the apartment where she was, desired her to kneel down by his side, and

receive a Priest's blessing from their friend. The blessing,—how fervently and solemnly bestowed, with what strongly-mingled feelings received, it were difficult to express,—was given; they arose from their knees; and the husband gently but authoritatively enjoined his wife to retire to rest. He himself, he said, had still some matters to discuss with Mr. Menteith, and should probably remain up late, nor must she be alarmed if she should hear them go out of doors, which he thought that they must be compelled to do before they parted, for reasons into which she must not inquire. She asked no more, but sought her chamber; and when her long and fervent devotions were over, and she had lain down in bed, she heard from her sleepless pillow the cautious opening of the sashed door conducting to the garden from the parlour, which was immediately beneath her room; and the stealthy tread of footsteps outside; but true to the spirit of her

husband's commands, made no effort to listen or discover anything farther; and the circumstance passed from her memory until long afterwards recalled.

Happily for himself, the brave and loyal-hearted Cameron did not survive to witness the final ruin of his master's cause. He fell gallantly at Falkirk, almost in the moment of victory; and the tidings were brought to Glentrochet by a wounded man, one of those who had followed him to the wars, and who only returned home to die. The widow, nearly broken-hearted, gained strength to sustain her bereavement from the prayers and the sympathy of her faithful pastor, as well as from the prospect, dashed with bitterness though it was, of becoming a mother, which for the first time was before her now. But days yet darker and more hopeless—days whose memory has left an indelible stain upon the name of England—were impending over the country; and it

was in the midst of tears, tribulation, and despair, that the posthumous son of Randal Cameron first beheld the light. He was born within twelve hours after the terrified household had first learned the news of the fatal day of Culloden, from a party of brutal soldiers, who burst into the house on pretext of searching for some documents of great consequence connected with the Prince's affairs, and said to have been in the custody of Cameron. Every repository was ransacked, but in vain ; no trace of any such papers could be discovered ; and enraged at their disappointment, every outrage and insult that malice could devise was heaped by the soldiers upon the family of three trembling women and an infirm old man ; without regard to the touching situation of the young widow, or even to her repeated asseverations that she knew of no documents of the sort, and felt assured that they never had been in the house. After consummating their work

by inflicting on their horror-stricken and shuddering hearers, a detail of the fiendish atrocities perpetrated by their Commander at Culloden, the savage intruders at last withdrew from the dwelling-house, and proceeded, after the fashion of the day, with regard to the residences of the Jacobites, to plunder the poultry-yard, to seize and drive off the two cows and half a score of sheep, which were all the live stock that they could find at hand, and to ham-string an old horse, the only one left behind, when the others belonging to Cameron had carried him and his servants to join the Prince. Ere they finally withdrew from the premises, they attempted to set fire to the offices; but from the thickness of the walls, and the circumstance of the thatched roofs being saturated by an incessant fall of heavy rain which had taken place during some previous days, the fire was speedily extinguished; though its blackened traces on the walls were long

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pointed out by the old persons who remembered that dreadful day. Its horrors were not yet over. Within two hours after the soldiers had left the place, a terrified fugitive came hurrying from the neighbouring Clachan, to tell that the same party had broken into the chapel, plundered it of the few sacred articles which it contained, and, after desecrating it in a manner too profane to be told, had ended by burning it, and also the cottage occupied by the clergyman, to the ground. Mr. Menteith, being absent on some pastoral duty at the time, had escaped their fury; but what could ultimately be anticipated for him, or any of the Episcopal Clergy, judging from past experience, save imprisonment or banishment to the colonies, should he fall into the hands of his enemies? These hideous tidings, and more hideous apprehensions for the safety of her almost paternal friend, coming at such a time, seemed the last drop of anguish in the

widow's brimming cup; and it was a subject of wonder to those around her, that either she herself, or her infant, survived the hour which distress and horror had unexpectedly brought upon her.

She did, however, survive it; and the venerated friend, whose probable fate had weighed so heavily upon her, was, by the Providence of God, spared yet awhile to the scattered and proscribed flock whom he would not desert, though long compelled to skulk, as a condemned fugitive, amongst them—shunning the very light of day, and performing his sacred functions in secrecy and darkness. But he was willing to brave all—all that the worst malice of his enemies could devise, to preserve the means of grace to his people. He had, as he said, no secular ties, no wife or child whose danger would have weighed upon his mind, and what could he do better than spend and be spent, even to his heart's blood, if need were, for the

flock over whom he was the appointed shepherd?

From house to house, amongst the families around, proprietors, farmers, and cottars, in a widely extended circuit, did the good man travel, frequently on a Sunday or festival, performing divine service, sixteen or even twenty times in a day, at as many different places, so as to elude the act which prescribed that not more than four individuals should meet at one time for worship according to the rites of the Church. And often in after and quieter years, did the younger Randal Cameron, the child born in the commencement of that dark night of persecution, point out the old ruinous shed, at the foot of a steep bank, darkly overhung by trees, beneath the lower boundary of his orchard, where, at the hour of midnight, in darkness, rendered visible by the light of one glimmering lanthorn, he had as an infant, been admitted by Mr. Menteith into the Ark of the Church.

His mother, as permitted in Scotland, took upon herself the vows of sponsor to her son, in conjunction with two neighbours, the grandfather of the Laird of Findlarick, and another gentleman, who had given this perilous proof of their sympathy with the widow, and their respect for her husband's memory, by assisting at a ceremony which, if discovered, might have cost them very dear.

Many such spots there were throughout the district ; old deserted barns near farm-houses, lofts above the stables of the gentry, deep, dark dells in lonely woods—caverns, hollowed by the waves, on the rocky coast—which were, and are still pointed out, as the localities where matrimony was, during those days, in many instances, solemnized, divine service performed, or the Holy Mysteries of the Faith dispensed by this devoted priest of God.

Nor was he a singular or a solitary

instance of such patient and long-suffering devotedness. Very much the contrary. All honour be to the memory of those meek, uncomplaining, martyr hearts, who, in the very depths of poverty and privation, under the constant terror of imprisonment and exile, persisted, struggled, suffered on, daring all the extremities of persecution, to preserve for their land the Apostolic gifts transmitted to their custody by those who had gone before them!

Too little has the Church in Scotland hitherto recked of her deep debt of gratitude to those departed saints. Too little do her sons, in modern days, revere the names, and acknowledge the priceless services, of the men who held life, and all that life holds most precious, as valueless in comparison with the true faith. They were those of whom the world is not worthy, and of whose sore trials the world never heard. No appeal to brute force, no pandering to the

passions of the multitude, no clamorous call for public sympathy ever came from them. In lowliness and submission they took up the Cross laid upon them, accepted their bitter portion at their Heavenly Master's hands, as a chastisement for former sins and unfruitfulness, and in the touching words of one amongst them,—“ So far from entertaining resentment against the authors or instruments of this hardship—prayed (after the example of the first martyrs) that it may not be laid to their charge.” In silence they endured, and in obscurity they died; their names survived only with a faithful few. But have not their works followed them? Is not the seed they sowed bearing fruit even now? and shall it not yet spring forth, and bear more and more abundantly?

Some years passed on, and Mrs. Cameron continued to live in her early home; that home which had witnessed the few brief years of her wedded happiness, and the long

sorrows of her widowhood ; and which, for the sorrows, even more than for the joys, was dearer to her now than it had ever been.

Although the estate, being originally her own and secured upon herself, had escaped confiscation, it had been sorely dilapidated by a heavy fine, not less than wasted and injured by numberless outrages committed by different parties of Hanoverian soldiery quartered in large numbers in that suspected county ; and she strove, by every exertion of prudence and careful management, as well as by extreme retirement and simplicity of life, to retrieve matters in some measure, during the childhood of her son, as well as to be able to spare the means of assisting the many poor surrounding her in those disastrous times, when a very blight seemed to have fallen upon Scotland. She was, according to all accounts, a good and gentle-hearted woman, "a widow indeed, and careful to maintain good works." Her spirits

had never recovered the shock of her husband's death, and the terrors of the day preceding her son's birth ; and as she often and thankfully acknowledged, she must long since have sunk under the weight of lonely care and sore anxiety which had been laid upon her, but for the consolation and support which she received from Mr. Menteith.

Since the period of her boy's completing his sixth year, the good old clergyman had consented to take up his abode under her roof, nominally in the character of tutor to the child, but still labouring in secret amongst his people, as devotedly as ever ; and the blessing of constant intercourse with such a mind, whose faith seemed to become ever clearer, his trust in God ever firmer, his love for the souls of men ever warmer, as he drew more near to the goal of his arduous race—was one whose strengthening and sanctifying influence diffused itself over her whole life and feelings.

It was Sunday morning—a bitter cold morning in January, 1755—and long before daylight, the little party, having concluded their domestic worship, drew round the breakfast-table in the parlour at Glentrochet. The widow stirred the fire into a yet warmer glow, and placed the chair of her venerable friend close by, between it and the table, ere beginning the morning meal. They were commencing the day thus early, in order to enable Mr. Menteith, as usual, to begin his round of pastoral duties, in sufficiently good time; and as they breakfasted, they discussed the extent of the range which the brief daylight of winter would permit him to traverse, and the order in which the different houses, should be visited. The Evening Service would be performed under their own roof, after his return. He himself was inclined to lengthen out the list of his visits further than Mrs. Cameron considered prudent. She reminded him that the ground was

covered with snow;—true, it was not deep, and was hard frozen, but more might fall ere night, and the roads through the glens were so soon blocked up by the drifts. There was a moon, but she would rise very late that night; and in short, by every argument in her power, she strove to persuade the clergyman to an early return, and that with a degree of eager and anxious earnestness, unusual with her, especially in cases where his duty was concerned, for with it she had never been wont to consider herself entitled to interfere.

“My dear friend,” said the old man, with a benevolent smile, “you are not used to be so timorous. It will be nine long years come May, since I have travelled these glens, winter and summer, day and night, (indeed, oftener by night than by day) frost and sunshine—aye! in all weathers. Many a sore blast have I met with among them, but by the mercy of God,” and he reverently

bent his head—"here I am still, hale and healthy; and here I hope to be, please God! this many a day to come. I have no fears of the weather."

"I wish I had none!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron; "but I am a poor feared" (*i. e.* terrified) "creature always, you know, sir, and you must just excuse me."

"Mother," interposed the boy Randal, "I wish I was old enough to go with Mr. Menteith, and help him to win through the snow. It'll not be long neither; for a' body says I am growing bigger and more man-like every day."

"But, my boy," said Mr. Mentieth, laying his hand on the little fellow's head, "supposing you were old enough to go with me, that would be only giving your mother two subjects of anxiety instead of one; which would not be right, you know, unless in a case of absolute duty and necessity. You must never do anything to grieve or

vex your good mother, Randal. You have to be husband, as well as son to her, both in one, since it has pleased God to remove your father. Remember that, my boy. It is a great privilege which He has entrusted to you ; an honourable charge that He has laid upon you ; and a very awful account will be demanded of how you have fulfilled it."

Awe-struck and impressed by the solemnity of the manner in which these words were uttered, the boy looked up in the face of his aged friend, but did not answer. Mr. Menteith drew him gently towards him, and began speaking of his father, the theme of all others possessing most interest for Randal. They had now finished breakfast ; and on Sunday mornings it was usual for Mr. Menteith to take his departure immediately upon the conclusion of that meal ; but on the present occasion, as Mrs. Cameron long afterwards remembered, a species of forgetfulness as to the

present moment seemed to have come over him. He remained in his chair by the fire-side—the boy standing between his knees; and for the space of half-an-hour went on recalling the days of his peaceful intercourse with the departed master of the house; reminding the widow of many little circumstances which she had forgotten—dwelling on the pleasant counsel which they had taken together, and gradually drawing nearer in the current of his reminiscences to the last earthly meeting which they had ever had.

“And here,” he said, while the widow wiped away the tears which were still ready to start at any mention of that name, “here it was, in this very chair at the fire-side, that I sat that night, and listened to his hopeful anticipations of returning after London was taken, and King James the Eighth seated on his father’s throne! Well, well, my boy, the Lord willed it otherwise. We have nothing to say. But by that token,

my dear friend," he added after a pause, and turning towards Mrs. Cameron, "remind me to-morrow, I beg of you, to tell you something which it is important that you should know, and which I am now getting too old to keep entirely to myself. It might do harm if I were taken away and no one knew. I have often of late reproached myself for not telling it to you, and constantly has something occurred to prevent my doing so. My time is up at present, and more than up. I forget time when I begin to speak of these old days."

He arose from his chair as he spoke. Mrs. Cameron also rose, again wiping away the tears which seemed only awaiting a word to set them a flowing that day.

"Your heart is heavy, and anxious beyond its usual wont to-day, my friend," he kindly said. "Try to cast your care upon the Lord. And kneel down, you and Randal, where you knelt with his father that night, and as

I did then, I will give you my blessing now, before I go."

They knelt in silence, and the blessing was given. Often—how often!—long after, did the strangely-solemn significance of that action return upon the widow's heart! Then, within a few minutes, the stout poney, which was the only beast of burden maintained in that small establishment, bore away the venerable man through the cold grey twilight of the frosty winter's morning, to his round of pious labours.

The day was far advanced; it had appeared unusually long to Mrs. Cameron, and it was now beginning to darken, more suddenly, as it seemed to her, than the hour warranted. She rose from her place by the fire-side, laid down her Bible, and went to the window in the recess, which I have described as running out of that side of the parlour. This window commanded a wider range of view than the sashed door, in winter

at least, when the leaves were off the trees ; and she stood gazing anxiously from it up towards the sky. It had continued since morning of the same dull, grey, leaden tint ; and there had not been a breath of wind to stir the motionless branches of the trees. But now the aspect of the heavens was changed ! A huge, heavy bank of dark, almost black, cloud was rising from the direction of the sea, and slowly spreading over the sky ; a peculiarly shrill, whistling, wailing wind was getting up, and tossing the leafless boughs in a wild and dreary manner, like long, naked, skeleton arms, now lifted high into the air, and now waving distractedly from side to side. But the sound most ominous to the ears of one, who, as a dweller upon the coast, was well acquainted with all the precursors of a storm, was audible below the whistling wind, like the diapason of some great organ. This was the long, low, booming noise from the sea, the most unfailing prognostic of foul weather ;

and still swelling louder and louder upon the senses; whilst, even at that distance, the white crests of foam, discernible through the obscurity upon the surface of the waves, gave sure indication that the tempest had begun at sea, and might speedily be expected inland.

Mrs. Cameron remained for a few minutes, her eyes intently fixed upon the swiftly darkening heavens; when even as she stood there, a louder, wilder gust of the wind began to rise; and forth in an instant flew the contents of that threatening cloud. An absolute whirlwind of snow came dashing against the panes of glass; the air was thick with the driving flakes. Thicker and thicker, faster and faster yet they came; whirling aloft and crossing each other, as opposing currents of air encountered them; large, heavy flakes, which did not melt as they fell, but silently, quietly, swiftly, accumulated on the ground, and rose and rose, higher and higher yet, till in the course of an hour a great

snow wreath was piled up to the level of the window-sill ; and still the heap went on, momentarily augmenting—momently, too, caught spinning up into the air by the furious blast, and driven against walls, or trees, or anything that opposed it; yet ever becoming higher and deeper all the while.

It was a regular snow-storm; a wild and fearful night! for night it now became; and yet it was still early in the evening. Long hours of darkness were before the household ; long hours of suspense in which nothing could be done—nothing attempted, for the rescue of Mr. Mentieth, if he were, as was but too probable, exposed to the fury of the tempest, which had broken just about the time when he might be supposed to be on his way home. He appeared not at the hour when he was expected ; and each succeeding, slow-dragging hour, as it added to the ever-accumulating snow-drifts, added to the impossibility of his doing so. There were no holy rites, no blessed Evening Prayers

that night for the anxious family, who had no alternative but to wait, and watch, and long for day. They were so utterly helpless! The infirm old man mentioned as Mrs. Cameron's only servant nine years before, was still alive, and still retained his place; though younger and stronger hands were now called in to aid him in the heavy portions of his work. But he was the only man within call; and in such a case as inefficient as the women, who now, mistress and maids brought together by their common subject of anxiety, stood trembling in the kitchen with little Randal, shuddering at every fresh blast, every crisp rattle on the window of the drifting snow; and yet endeavouring to comfort each other with the reiterated assurance that the minister was, beyond all doubt, safe at one or another of several houses which they named. He never would be permitted to leave any house during a storm like that; depend upon it he was in

perfect safety. They wilfully shut their eyes to the fact that the storm might have overtaken him on his way from one house to another, in some of the deep glens through which his road lay. This the maids did not, or would not, see; and if their mistress did, it was too dreadful a possibility to be uttered by her lips. But long after they had talked away most of their fears, and sunk into profound sleep; long after her little son had been laid to rest in his small bed beside her own, did the widow sit watching that weary night, in anxiety and suspense which mock description. Long did she kneel in prayer, pouring forth her agonized petitions for the life of her beloved friend; long did she pace the room and wring her hands, and stand still and listen to the shrieking wind, and the rustling snow upon the panes; often did she ask, in sick and sinking desolation of spirit—"When, when will it be day?" At last, worn out and weary, she lay down upon her bed, and

fell into the weary sleep of exhaustion, from which the sleeper awakens unrefreshed to a heavier burden of anguish than before.

The day came at last; the ghastly winter dawn. It broke upon a dreary blank of snow, heaped high against the lower windows of the house; in fact, nearly blinding those on the side next the blast; but there was no more falling, and the wind was lulled. The widow and her servants were anxiously consulting on the possibility of conveying a message to the nearest farm house; and the youngest maid, a strapping country lass, declaring herself ready and willing to try to make her way through the snow, when two men were seen slowly struggling up the avenue, armed with spades, wherewith they were clearing their passage where the drifts lay deepest. These proved to be a father and son, tenants of a farm about two miles from Glentrochet, and nearer to the coast. Their first words sent an icy pang as of death to

the heart of Mrs. Cameron. They had come to see if Mr. Menteith had arrived safely at home over night. They could not rest till they knew. He had left their house on his way home about half an hour before the blast began, and they trusted he would be clear of the glen by that time; but the snow had been pretty deep there even before this fresh fall, and it was ill riding through it, and one way or another, their minds misgave them—but he was safe—they trusted he was safe! Alas! the dismayed and horror-stricken countenances of those they addressed, rendered an answer in words superfluous. The widow uttered none, but wrung her hands in speechless agony.

There was no time to waste in words; the men hastily departed, carrying with them cordials, and having stout ropes secured around them, and summoned the male inhabitants of one or two houses on the way, to assist in the search. It was tedious, for the snow had drifted to a great

depth in the glens towards the sea, and it was through one of these, the glen visible from the back of Glentrochet Place, that the narrow bridle-path lay by which the old clergyman must have been on his homeward way, when the storm overtook him.

And there at last, just where the path made an abrupt turn round the face of a rock, close by the stream, they found the venerable man, half buried in a wreath of snow. He had evidently been many hours dead, and it was conjectured, from the position in which he lay, that he must have dismounted from his pony, and endeavoured to find his way on foot around the projecting rock ; and that, bewildered by the heaps of snow, and blinded by the spin-drift, which had been furious in those narrow gulleys, he had missed the way, and stepping into the soft bed of snow, that filled the channel of the stream, had fallen, and been unable to regain his feet ; in which case, death would speedily overtake him, in the form it assumes in such cases,

that of intense and overpowering drowsiness.

The pony was found alive, at no great distance. Abandoned to its own discretion, the instinct of the animal had prompted it to make its way to the lee-side of some thorn bushes, which were comparatively sheltered from the drift, and there it was cowering close beneath the species of penthouse formed by their branches, all turned away from the sea breezes, as is usual in such localities.

Thus, then, perished the aged man of God. In his Master's service he had spent his life, and in it he died. Seldom has a human soul, more fully prepared for a sudden summons, been called to meet its Maker, than that which, through the darkness and the storm, and the dizzying snow drifts, had that night ascended to Him.

But who can paint the anguish, the desolation of the widowed heart whose earthly stay and support he had so long been? Who can describe the sobs of agony, the

floods of tears, poured forth over that serene countenance, the face of her friend and father, so lately beaming with its kind and benevolent smile upon her and her fatherless boy, as in the cold winter's morning he rode away from her dwelling, whose threshold he was to cross in life no more? Her sorrow was boundless—a sorrow that refused to be comforted, and which time, as it passed, seemed only to deepen, not appease.

The remains of the venerated pastor were laid in consecrated earth, in a spot which he had long since indicated as his final resting-place, a small solitary churchyard on a green hill beside the sea, once the cemetery of a church demolished at the Reformation. A brother clergyman made his way across the snow-covered country, from a distance of thirty miles off, a perilous journey in every sense, in order that the last holy rites of the Church might not be wanting on so solemn an occasion. These were performed—not by the grave—that privilege was long

denied the children of the suffering Church in Scotland; but in the utmost privacy, and with every precaution against surprise, ere the body was removed from the house; and then all was over; and time rolled on, as time does ever roll. The snow melted from the hills; the streams ran clear and sparkling down the vallies; flowers came out upon the earth; the grass sprang up on that new grave in the old resting-place of the departed; for whom the long waves breaking on the rocks beneath seemed to be singing a perpetual requiem. The sky was bright and warm above it; and the lark sang merrily, high in the air, over the tombs. It was the lovely season of early summer; but the eyes of one inconsolable mourner turned wearily away from the beauty and the promise all around; and derived no pleasure from the affluence of sweetness poured out upon the earth.

Mrs. Cameron was, in fact, utterly prostrated by this last and crowning blow; the

manner of whose infliction served, if possible, to aggravate its bitterness. She could not rouse herself, could not resume her interest in life, though she mechanically fulfilled its daily round of duties. Even her little son, her last and dearest treasure, now that she was bereft of him who had so wisely and faithfully laboured to instruct the boy, became to her a source of deep and ever-augmenting anxiety, too sadly inevitable in her circumstances, but which the state of her nerves and spirits rendered morbidly keen. Day by day passed on and brought her no calmness—no resignation. Night after night, when all save herself had retired to rest, would she sit alone in her solitary parlour, living over again the by-gone days of happiness with her husband and her friend; thence passing on to the hours of loneliness and anxiety, broken by that brief re-union—terminated at last by that dark close of all. Then she would think of the fatherly counsel, the pity, the love, and prayers,

which had so lightened the burden of her widowhood. She would go over all, all their intercourse; recall every word, every look, every action, down to the last, that solemn blessing invoked upon her own and her boy's head ere he went away. She would dwell upon the injunction he had laid upon her, to bid him tell her next day some secret which he dreaded to let die with him. What was it? Now she would never know. It *had* died with him. There had been no next day—no more time for him. He had indeed come home to her, but how? And as the scene again arrayed itself before her, she would clasp her hands over her head, and fling herself forward in one of those passions of despairing tears and sobs which had become habitual with her in the hours of unrestrained indulgence of her grief, and call wildly upon her friend, her father, to return to her, to come back, were it but for one hour—to comfort her in her utter desolation.

Hers was not, in short, submissive sor-

row. It was of that species which in days when a clearer and simpler faith existed in the connexion between the seen and the unseen world,—days which modern enlightenment brands as superstitious,—was considered to render those who wilfully indulged such a frame of mind liable to the supernatural visitations which it rashly courted. Nor do I suppose that any one to whom, though not for years after the event, Mrs. Cameron ever related what I am now about to do, would for a moment have thought of doubting its actual occurrence, or of resolving it into dreams, impressions on over-excited nerves, curious coincidences, or any of the other stock phrases by which it is now customary to characterise what it is impossible, on ordinary principles, to explain.

It was a warm and beautiful night in the month of June, and the sashed door of the parlour stood open, admitting a flood of soft moonlight into the room, and filling it

with the fragrant odours of the flowers without. The solitary occupant sat at a small table in the recess, on which stood a single candle. She was engaged in what was a greater effort to a woman in those days than it is now,—writing a letter; and the document itself was one which it had cost her not a little to begin. She had made up her mind, with what pain and reluctance it may well be imagined, that on account of her boy's education, to which there was now no one at hand to attend, it would be indispensable for her to leave Glentrochet, and remove to some town where he might attend a school without quitting his mother's roof; and she was at this moment writing to an early friend in Aberdeen, which occurred to her from various causes as the most eligible place within her reach, to make enquiries respecting a residence there, with a view to removing to it before the ensuing winter.

Several times, during the slow progress which she made in this task, she had laid down her pen, leant her head upon her desk, and wept; overcome by the choking sensation of grief which came over her, in the idea of quitting her beloved home, and entering in her solitary position, and with her lacerated heart, upon a world of strangers. Repeatedly she had exclaimed to herself—“If *He* had been still alive, this need not have been!” Till at last, unable longer to restrain the passion of her distress, she rose, pushed aside her writing, and issuing out by the open door into the garden, paced up and down the walk beneath the house for some little time, weeping and sobbing bitterly. Then, her tears having spent themselves and the soft mild air and cool sweet moonlight gradually exerting their influence in calming and soothing her feelings, she sauntered slowly down the middle walk of the garden, which I have already described,

till reaching the terrace at its lower end, she stood there, looking out from between the branches of the orchard-trees beneath upon the lovely and quiet scene, inhaling the breath of the flowers, and drinking in the stillness and repose surrounding her, with the sensations wherewith we are wont to gaze upon some long-loved countenance, whose light is about to be withdrawn from us for an uncertain period of absence; lingering on every feature, and garnering up every line, to lay up in our heart of hearts against the dreary time of separation.

At last she turned, and began to re-ascend the turfen walk towards the house, when she was startled to perceive a figure, the figure of a man, standing full before her and close beside the sun-dial. Her heart leapt to her throat; but making an effort over herself, she boldly advanced a few paces, supposing it to be her old servant, whom some unexpected reason had induced

to seek her at that unusual hour. She was now near enough to distinguish the person clearly in the bright moonlight. The face, the form,—were before her,—distinct as when they parted last. They were those of her lost and lamented friend! It was himself who stood in her path. She was close to him. His eyes were fixed upon her face.

A pang,—a thrill of terror unutterable,—that maddening terror to which no *human* fear presents a parallel, darted through her at the apparition. Claspings her hands over her eyes with a stifled shriek, she turned, fled down the path, and round by the opposite side of the garden with the speed of lightning; never stopping till she reached, and darted through, the open door.

Nor did she pause to close it, not daring to turn back or glance behind her. She caught up the candle from the table, hastily crossed the room, opened the door, and advanced a step into the passage.

There he stood again, full in her path. She could not go on without passing close to him. There was no delusion. Never had she seen Mr. Menteith more plainly in her life than she beheld him now. He looked, as he had done on the morning of their last parting, with his mild, benevolent eyes full upon her face;—his reverend countenance, long white hair, and holy, Apostolic aspect, all as distinct and life-like in her sight, as if the grave had given up its dead.

But that aspect, so loved in life, conveyed no emotion, save that of horror, to the panic-stricken woman, thus placed, face to face, in the lonely night, with a tenant of that awful, unseen world, whose near approach it would seem that our human organization is scarcely fitted to endure. Hastily retreating into the room she had just quitted, she flung to the door, tottered, rather than walked, to the settee by the fire-place, and sank down upon it in a swoon.

This did not long continue. The fresh, cool air from the open garden door in a few minutes revived her; and pressing her hands upon her glazed and swimming eyes, she lay in the confusion of ideas attendant upon the return of consciousness, endeavouring to recal what it was that had so moved her.

Then, as the terrible recollection awoke, she started up, resolved at all hazards to make her way to the room, at the extremity of the house, occupied by her maid servants, and arouse them; for she felt as if, without some human voice, some human presence near her, her very reason must give way. She started up, but again sank backwards with a shuddering groan; for there again, straight before her, within three paces of her couch, she beheld the same apparition, his eyes bent upon her with a look of inexpressible sadness and solemnity, but silent and motionless as ever.

Shivering, shaking from head to foot, her

very heart collapsing beneath the unimaginable agony of supernatural terror, her hands pressed into her eyes, she sat for a few seconds; an age as they seemed to her of mortal apprehension. Then again, by a sudden impulse, she removed her hands, and looked up. He was still there; and the very extremity of her fear gave her the courage to address him.

"In the name of God!" she asked, in a hoarse, faint, shuddering voice, "why are you here? Why have you come to me?"

Then he opened his lips and answered her, in a low, strange tone, as if of a voice from some far distant region—more like the echo of a sound than the sound itself. And yet it was *his* voice, too.

"My friend, why did you not speak to me sooner? Your grief has disturbed my rest, and brought me back. I heard you calling me, and I have come. But do not dread me, I have come to comfort you.

You must not yield to faithless fears for the well-doing of your son ; He who saw fit to take me away, is able to raise up other friends to guide his youth ; and He will do so in His own good time ; nor must you sin against Him by murmuring that He, in His love and wisdom, has recalled what He gave. You must dry your tears, which trouble me where I am now, and which are an offence unto Him Who has promised to be the Father of the Fatherless, and the Husband of the Widow. Give yourself up to His guidance. Resign your will to His, and He will make your dark path light. Be comforted, my dear friend, I am constant in my prayers for you and yours, in the place where I abide. We are only parted in the body, and that but for a little while. Now you must rise and follow me, for my time is nearly out, and I have somewhat still to tell you."

He passed on, as he spoke, towards the glass door, with a strange gliding motion, as

she afterwards described it, not like walking. She rose, and—her knees knocking together, her head swimming round—attempted to follow. He went out at the open door, and by the time she had reached it, she beheld him where he first had met her sight, standing by the sun-dial. He raised his hand and beckoned to her; but overstrained nature here gave way, and she fell upon the floor, in another death-like swoon.

The rising sun was shining full into the parlour, the jubilant chorus of the birds was ascending from every branch and every spray, when Mrs. Cameron, slowly reviving, raised herself from where she had lain so long unconscious, and looking around her, beheld the door by which he had gone out before her still standing open, her unfinished letter on the desk, and the candle which she had used on the previous night, burnt down into the socket.

Slowly, like one moving in her sleep, she replaced the letter, locked the desk, closed the glass door, and then, creeping upstairs, undressed herself and retired to bed, which an attack of illness, consequent upon the terror and agitation of the night, prevented her from quitting for some days after.

During this period she had ample time to reflect upon the mysterious communication which had been made to her ; to feel that it was her own sinful and rebellious questioning of the will of Almighty God, and presumptuous desire to see into His hidden things, which had drawn upon her a visitation such as she had found her frail mortal frame all unequal to sustain ; while, at the same time, by a just retribution, she had been denied the power to hear that secret, whatever it was, which it imported her so much to know. For, with all her sense of this loss, it was impossible for her to bring herself to desire a renewal of what

she had felt that her reason could not bear if it were repeated ; and amidst her humble prayers of penitence , for her fault, were mingled the most fervent entreaties that it might never again be thus awfully visited upon her.

From the hour that saw her arise from her sick bed, Mrs. Cameron was an altered woman. The visitation had not come upon her in vain. There was no more rebellious grief, no more despair. She calmly took up her Cross ; calmly, patiently, at last even cheerfully, discharged all her duties, and interested herself in all around her ; earnestly labouring, to the utmost of her ability, to instruct her little boy, whose sole guide she had now become. And when the bitter day of parting from her home had arrived, she was enabled to quit it, and all its hallowed and never-to-be-forgotten associations, with more of fortitude than she had dared to hope. Henceforth the Place remained under

the care of the servant who managed the farm, and was only occasionally visited by her during her residence at Aberdeen, where young Randal pursued his school courses, and afterwards completed his education, at Marischal College, with much credit to his instructors, and a high reputation for good conduct and steadiness. When all this was over, he repaired to Edinburgh in order to study for the bar, and his mother once more took up her abode at the old Place.

Young Randal Cameron had been for a few years in practice as an advocate in Edinburgh, when an unexpected claimant came forward to assert a right to his mother's property. This was a young man who gave himself out as the grandson of her uncle, the elder brother of her father, who had joined the calamitous expedition to Darien, and was understood by his family to have died there, where so many Scotchmen perished. In opposition to this, he was

asserted by his so-styled descendant, to have escaped to the West Indies, married, and died there, leaving children; and the alleged claim was supported by so ingeniously-contrived a chain of evidence as plainly proved it to be the work of some one well acquainted with the Scottish family history of the period; in all probability a descendant of some other unfortunate settler at Darien, aided by some clever and unprincipled lawyer. The case speedily assumed a serious aspect; and at last, after lengthened litigation, came to such a crisis, that it was given as the decided opinion of Cameron's legal adviser, that nothing short of positive proof of the death of Alexander Duff, the alleged grandfather of the claimant, at a period anterior to the date produced of his marriage, could save his clients from the loss of their suit and of their property.

It had, from the commencement of the affair, been the repeatedly-expressed convic-

tion of Mrs. Cameron that such proof existed. She stated that she distinctly recollected, when a girl, having assisted her father in arranging some papers in his charter chest, and having on that occasion seen and read a letter, addressed to her grandfather by one of the few survivors of that ill-starred scheme on his arrival in Scotland, giving a detailed account of his son's death at an early period of the expedition to Darien; and adding some dying injunctions to his family, which he had requested the writer to deliver, should he ever be able to communicate with them. This letter, could it have been found, would have been sufficient to invalidate the claim; but on search being made in the Glentrochet charter chest, by the old writer in the county town, in whose custody it was, no such document could be discovered. And, what was stranger still, not that letter alone, but various other papers of consequence, were found to be

missing. The charter chest had been sent to the care of this writer by Mrs. Cameron's deceased husband, previous to the breaking out of the war in —45 ; but, except for the purpose of taking out the widow's marriage settlement, which lay uppermost in it, no one had ever had occasion to open it since then ; nor, on reference being made to the inventory of its contents, in Mr. Cameron's hand-writing, which had accompanied it, was there any mention discovered to be made there of these missing papers, which his widow well knew had once formed part of its contents, and for whose absence she was unable to account.

The affair began to look very gloomy. Young Cameron made two expeditions from Edinburgh to Glentrochet ; and not only went over every paper in the chest in company with the man of business on both occasions, but examined every drawer, every cabinet, every nook and cranny within the house, where by any

possibility any papers could have been concealed; but all in vain. He returned to Edinburgh, after the last of these investigations, in a most anxious and desponding frame of mind; nerving himself, in fact, for the most disastrous issue to the trial, which was to come off before the Courts in a very short time.

But within a week after his last departure from Glentrochet, his mother was early one morning amazed by his unexpected return. He had ridden post all night; and his mind was evidently full of some intelligence, which they had no sooner dispatched breakfast than he hastened to impart to her.

“Mother,” he said, “I do not know what the wits and learned men in Edinburgh, who believe nothing but what they can see and feel, and touch and taste, would say if they heard me tell what had brought me back, but you have taught me to think very differently; though on most subjects of the

kind I keep my thoughts to myself, at least in their company. To cut a long tale short, I have returned here in consequence of a very remarkable dream with which I was visited the night before last. I had gone to bed, my mind full of anxious thoughts respecting this lost paper, and tossed and tumbled a long while before I could get to sleep. At last, however, I did, when it seemed to me that I was walking on the sea shore down yonder, close to the old kirk-yard; when I was aware of some one coming from it, down the hill-side, towards me; and as he drew nearer I recognised one whom I have never forgotten—my good old honoured master, Mr. Menteith. Yes,”—in answer to an exclamation of awe and astonishment from his mother. “Yes, it is an old story now since that sore day that he was taken from us, but I should have known him among ten thousand. And yet there was a change in him, too; a look of peace, and

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joy—and—together I cannot pretend to describe it. He was the same, and yet wonderfully different from what he used to be. He met me in the old kind way, and laid his hand upon my head as he used to do when I was a boy, saying, as he did it:—

“ ‘Welcome, my dear Randal! I was looking for you.’

“ ‘But,’ I said, suddenly recollecting myself, ‘how do you come to be here, Mr. Menteith?—are you not dead?’

“ ‘I am,’ he replied; ‘I have been long dead, as you may remember; but I do not forget those I loved in life, where I am now; and it is because I love you well that I have come to tell you something which much concerns you at this time. You are in great trouble—are you not, respecting the paper which is missing from your mother’s charter chest?’

“ I answered that I was; that unless that paper could be found, we should lose our

estate, and come to utter ruin, and that I had sought it everywhere in vain.

“ ‘Set your heart at rest, my son,’ he answered, ‘that paper is safe. Attend to me, and I will tell you where it is to be found.’ Before your father departed to join Prince Charles, I assisted him, under a solemn promise of secrecy, to conceal some very important documents relating to the missions with which he had been entrusted by the Royal Family, and which it would not have been safe for him to carry about his person. He had, previously to that, divided the papers in the family charter-chest; and leaving your mother’s settlement in it, in case of any mischance coming over him, had placed some which he considered it of consequence to preserve from any risk of falling into bad hands, in a fire-proof box belonging to himself. Therein he had deposited the Prince’s papers; and sunk it, with my help, in a hole which he had prepared and lined with stone

for the purpose, at the foot of the sun-dial in the garden. On his return home for the last time, I again assisted him, at midnight, to lift this box, whence he took a certain document which was wanted for the Prince's service; and then we buried it once more, under a renewed promise on my part of inviolable secrecy. This promise it would have been my duty to break so far as to impart the secret to your mother, had I been spared to do so. But it was otherwise decreed. Go you, my son, to Glentrochet, and you will find the box where I have told you. Take the paper you require, and restore the others to their place of concealment, until all those whom they might injure have departed this life.

“He ceased to speak, and with his words still ringing in my ears,—his living face—I could have said—still distinctly before me,—I started awake, and instantly resolved to act upon the advice so singularly given.

The secret must not, of course, go beyond yourself, my dear mother ; but you will find means to engage all the servants in some other direction, and enable me as quickly as possible to satisfy myself."

The result of Cameron's search was not long doubtful. He found the iron box where he had been told ; and having recovered the valuable document he wanted, replaced the rest of its contents in their place of security, and buried it once more. The estate was preserved to the family ; and from the period of that vision it was observable that a great change began to take place in his character. He had always been a steady, sober-minded, right-feeling youth. But he now became something more. A higher and deeper tone ran through all he did and said ; and in an age of callous indifference, too often of open infidelity, he was remarkable as one who dared to be, not only a staunch and devoted adherent to

the Church, but a holy and humble-minded Christian. Little remains to be told concerning him. He married, and after the death of his mother, at an advanced age, quitted the bar, and took up his residence entirely at Glentrochet, where he occupied himself in good works, and in efforts to improve the condition of all within his influence. The estate passed from him to an only daughter, who dying unmarried, it came to be sold after her death. Mr. Cameron himself had long survived the death of Cardinal York; after which final extinction of the house of Stuart, he conceived himself authorised to disinter the iron box; and the Laird of Findlarick, who had known him well and intimately, had learned its history from his own lips. It was not a tale which he would have related to every one; but in him it found a congenial auditor; and now that all who might have been hurt by its finding publicity had long

since departed the stage, the good old gentleman felt it no breach of trust to disclose it.

Whether or not the whole audience listened to the narrative with the same intent and breathless interest which thrilled the inmost hearts of one or two amongst them, I cannot tell. In my own case, I know that the impression has been indelible, and that its connexion with a theme on which, above all others, I delight to dwell, the communion between the visible and invisible world, has invested the memory of that ancient place with associations which will for ever lend it a sacredness in my eyes. I shall in all human probability never behold it again; nor do I even know whether it still stands, or has been demolished—a victim to the rage for improvement, which has everywhere altered the face of the country. But that is of no consequence. It remains for me, a spot over which time and change have no

power. I see it still, as I saw it first and last—its vacant chambers—its deserted court—its untrimmed flowers and untrodden garden-walks—the silence, the quiet, the loveliness deeper than repose ever brooding over it—the voiceless hush pervading all the scene, once visited by the presence of a departed spirit. Thus it is imprinted on my remembrance—thus have I in fancy beheld it now, dear friend, in these few hours when I have cheated my mournful thoughts by an excursion into the regions of the past. Accept it, therefore, humble though it be, this offering of the results of my backward-looking glance; and if you cannot lend your faith as implicitly as I do to a tale so strange, yet bear kindly with what you deem my credulity; and read in a spirit as candid as that with which it has been written, my

LEGEND OF AN OLD HOUSE.

HELMSLEY HALL.

VOL. II.

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HELMSLEY HALL.

CHAPTER I.

"The machinery for dreaming, planted in the human brain, was not planted for nothing. That faculty, in alliance with the mystery of darkness, is the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy."

De Quincy.

THE following narrative, a page from the romance of real life,—or rather, for its few and unimportant incidents do not merit the title of romance,—one of those tales of household love and sorrow, "the common growth of mother Earth," which are more touching to the heart in some moods, than the most elaborate fiction, was given to the author by an old and valued friend, a lady

from the North, in whom his incidents were related, and from whose words they are here transcribed.

It is—so runs her story—now upwards of twenty-five years ago since I first crossed the border, and went to reside for several months in an ancient cathedral city in the west of England, for the purpose of visiting the family of a clerical friend, lately transposed to a prebendal stall there. I had never before seen a Cathedral, or even enjoyed the privilege of the Daily Service; and you may imagine how delightful was the change to me educated as I had been from childhood in the most devout feelings of reverence towards the Church; and whose sole experience of her Services had been formed in my native land. There, as we may thankfully acknowledge, the fires of affliction and persecution have been blessed to the realization of almost Apostolic purity in her state and doctrines; but her poverty

has at the same time interfered with the outward honour which man owes to the house and service of his Maker. The stately temple which I now beheld, seemed one meet for the solemn purpose to which it was dedicated. Its venerable antiquity, so carefully guarded from ruin or decay, yet all belonging to a former age, and having so little in common with the present; its stillness, its seclusion, so far removed from the din and tumult of the work-a-day world, with the perpetual atmosphere of melody, the morning and evening incense of prayer and praise overshadowing and sanctifying all the ongoings of life in its vicinity; these things made me feel as if suddenly transported into another state of existence, and one belonging to a time when the world was younger and more in earnest than it is in the present age.

To the living adjuncts of this time-hallowed place, the dignified clergy, who, with

their families, composed its principal society, the same charm of novelty for awhile attached itself; and I found something consonant to the character of the scene in the polished ceremoniousness and grave formality of a society, which, like those of all cathedral towns, piqued itself, and with justice, on its superior style and unimpeachable respectability. But after a time, as I became more initiated into its secrets, I discovered in it as great a lack of the elements of poetry, as there was a superabundance of these in the place itself; detected a degree of worldliness and conventionalism of tone, even in regard to sacred things; a secularizing spirit; no necessary adjunct, certainly, to such a scene, and painfully at variance with its original purposes. To this was added the circumstance that the society itself, with few exceptions, was elderly in sentiment as well as in years; and principally composed of very excellent, but somewhat

uninteresting persons, whose matter-of-fact propriety, and fatiguing good sense, gradually sank upon my spirits, in the words of Madame de Staël, like a "manteau de plomb."

From this state of feeling—a most repugnant one to a mind full of lively imagination—I was aroused by the acquisition of a most agreeable companion in the daughter of a country gentleman, whose seat was about ten miles from the town, and who came to pass a few weeks at the house of a family very intimate with the friends with whom I was a guest. Similarity of tastes and pursuits soon created an intimacy between us, and my new friend, being an indefatigable pedestrian, I soon acquired an extended knowledge of the beautiful neighbourhood of the town under her guidance, and learned much that was interesting in local history, from her accurate knowledge of her native county. One day we departed

together on a walk of two miles or thereabouts, to visit an old hall, the grounds of which were said to be very beautiful, and which at present stood untenanted; the proprietor, who had succeeded to it as heir of entail, having a residence of his own in another county, and only visiting it occasionally. The day we had chosen was one peculiarly well adapted for displaying to advantage the beauties of the rich woodland scenery through which our road lay. It was one of those summer days that alternate between bright and dark; when large, heavy masses of white-edged clouds at times swallow up the sunlight, causing the blue depths between to look deeper and yet more intensely blue, and then again the glorious radiance bursts forth, the brighter from its temporary obscuration, casting the most beautiful variety of light and shadow over the masses of foliage, the green lawns, the meadows greener still with their second

crop of clover, and the ripening fields of corn. Our road lay through deep shady lanes, and paths, skirting the edges of extensive woods; till crossing by a rustic bridge over a little quiet brook, not flashing and sparkling in the sunlight, and hurrying with its rippling music over tiny rocks and pebbles, like the "bickering burnies" of my native land, but stealing gently along as is the wont of streams in a level country, between banks fringed with willows and fragrant meadow sweet, we reached a small gate in the park paling, which admitted us to the grounds of Helmsley Hall.

The gate was unlocked; for, as my companion informed me, it never had been the custom of the former family to exclude any respectable visitors from their grounds. "They were good, kind, old-English hearts, the Stanleys, one and all," said she, "pleasant neighbours to the rich, and unfailing friends to the poor; and I fancy they

thought the safety of their property better secured in the goodwill of all who knew them, than by locks and bolts, or man-traps and spring-guns. And so it proved, for one never heard of any unfair advantage being taken of their open gates and the free ingress to their grounds. And now the gates are left open because it has always been the custom, and there is nobody sufficiently interested in the place to care to shut them."

These words excited my curiosity to inquire into the history of "the former family," a phrase which always conveys a melancholy impression, particularly when coupled with a fine old place like that which we were now approaching, and my companion promised to satisfy me presently, but in the meantime called my attention to the beauty of the paths we were traversing. "It would be a pity," she said, "to withdraw your attention from them to listen to a mournful, though not very eventful story,

which I can tell you as well at another time."

They were indeed beautiful woodland paths; not gravelled walks, but merely foot-ways broad enough for two to walk abreast, cut in the mossy turf; and once trimly kept, but now encroached upon by the vegetation, as though it were long since any one had cleaned or weeded them. And beautiful, most beautiful, were the old umbrageous trees amongst which they wound; scattered singly or in groups, over the green grass of what my friend told me had once been a deer-park, but was now grazed by sheep alone. The way we were going led us through a deep shrubby dingle, at the bottom of which ran the brook already mentioned, which we crossed by a second bridge, and, ascending the opposite side, passed by another gate into the lawn more immediately in front of the house, and found ourselves in the approach which led to it from

the principal lodge, a long way round compared to the short cut by which we had come from the town.

The hall was one of those old Elizabethan mansions of which one finds so many amongst the country residences of England, not in itself remarkable for anything, save its look of time-honoured respectability, and of having been preserved inviolate from modern innovations.

All was in keeping, all in accordance with the age of the building, which stood upon a gentle slope, sheltered by a grove of magnificent trees, looking coeval with itself. Along one side of the house ran a terrace-walk, edged by an ancient carved balustrade of stone, nearly covered by climbing plants, amongst which the yellow and white jasmine were in most profusion, and, clothed with their pale and golden little stars, were loading the very air with sweetness. From the middle of this terrace a flight of stone steps

descended to another, and that again to a third and fourth ; all the lower terraces bordered, each by a hedge of yew, so thick and close as to look like a green wall, and allowed at regular intervals to grow to a considerable height, for the purpose of being cut into the monstrosities so dear to the gardeners of our forefathers—St. George with the dragon, griffins, and above all, the Stanley crest, the eagle and child—at least what purported to represent that device—but all sadly neglected and grown out of shape. These warm sunny terrace-walks were each bordered on the opposite side with flowers, on whose culture it was evident that no small pains had once been bestowed ; and still, uncared-for as they seemed, their desolate luxuriance overspread the bounds that had once confined them ; and in various nooks stood old stone benches, and several rustic seats of more modern date, but dropping to pieces from exposure to the weather.

There was a peculiar degree of solemn stillness and silence diffused over this deserted pleasure, trodden by the feet of so many generations, unchanged amid all their changes, and now smiling in its unheeded beauty and repose beside the empty house whence these generations had passed away, and beneath the eternal skies that watch the mutations of this lower world.

A word or audible sound seemed out of place in this atmosphere of memory; and my friend and I proceeded without speaking from one terrace to another, till, at the foot of the slope, we found ourselves on the edge of a small circular fish-pond, surrounded by banks of turf once shaven as smooth as velvet, in the middle of which a stone dolphin, with tail erect, had in former days discharged a fountain from its open jaws. Immediately opposite to where we stood, a turfen walk, straight as a dart, and bordered by gigantic yew hedges, was terminated by

the lofty iron gates of the garden. Amid its "pleached bowers and alleys green" we rambled long, contrasting its beautiful diversity with the prim formality of a modern garden; then quitting it we pursued a winding walk, overhung by the depending branches of fine old lime trees, "musical with bees," which skirted the banks of an artificial lake, at whose upper extremity stood an old-fashioned summer house.

"Now," said my friend, as we entered it, "if you will rest here awhile, I, who am a better pedestrian, and not in the least fatigued, will return to the house by a shorter way than the one we have come, and enquire if we can be admitted to see it. It is not a show house, and I know there are no orders to exhibit it to visitors; but an exception may perhaps be made in our favour, and there is a beautiful picture, a family group, that I want to show you, before telling you the history of those who

compose it. If I find that we cannot be allowed admission, why then we must return whence we came, and I know that we can get out of the grounds in this direction, without being forced to retrace our steps."

My remonstrances on the additional trouble this arrangement would cause her, being overruled, she accordingly left me to rest in the summer-house, which, to own the truth, I was not loth to do. I seated myself by one of its windows, looking down a steep bank into a kind of nook, which appeared to me one of the sweetest spots I had yet seen in this place so full of sweetness and beauty. It was a small grassy semicircle, open in front to the lake, and everywhere else surrounded by trees and flowering shrubs; near its centre grew a very fine acacia, beneath which stood a rustic sofa, formed of fantastically twisted branches, and less completely fallen to decay than the other seats which I had seen.

Whilst I was gazing down upon it, in the listless dreaming mood induced by fatigue, the heat of the day, and the perfect stillness of the scene around me, I suddenly heard the sound of voices, not far off—sounds not out of keeping with the scene, for they were low, sweet, and inexpressibly mournful; and glancing through the open door of the summer-house, I beheld the figures of two ladies, in deep mourning, slowly advancing, arm-in-arm, up the lime-tree walk; and, as they came nearer, I recognised them as persons whose appearance had greatly interested me in the Cathedral, where they seemed unfailing attendants on the morning service, at which they sat very near the place I occupied.

I had more than once attempted to find out who they were, but the friends with whom I resided, themselves new comers, could tell me nothing of them. They were, so I imagined, sisters—both young, and she

who seemed the younger was attired in widow's weeds; both were possessed of a considerable degree of beauty, and in the demeanour of both, there was added to much natural refinement, something of that elevation of aspect, that peculiar sanctity, which invests those upon whom the Almighty has laid His chastening hand, and to whom He has hallowed the chastisement.

There was a mournful contrast between the youthfulness of outline, and the unfurrowed clearness of complexion in the faces of both, and their pale, calm immobility, the hollowness of the eyes, which told of floods of tears, and that peculiar expression about the mouth, which, to the physiognomist, always unfold a tale of much bygone suffering. But whatever had been the peculiar trials of these two sisters, they were evidently no longer in their first intensity. Theirs was not the aspect of present but of past suffering—the calm, the stillness, that follow the

wasting storm—the serenity of those for whom life offers little more to hope or fear—not apathy, nor indifference, but resignation.

Although I never had met them in society, nor when I happened to be with any one who could gratify my curiosity with respect to their names and history, we had had one or two chance encounters in walking on the ancient rampart of the town, and, more frequently, in the venerable cloisters, which, on three sides, surround a small grass court, connecting the Cathedral with the Bishop's palace. Here I used to fancy something appropriate to the monastic character of the scene, in their mourning garments and noiseless tread, in the black veils, thrown back, and disclosing their pale, sweet faces, and in the low tones of their conversation, as they passed slowly by or lingered to catch the long rays of the sun, slanting through the dark-browed arches, and across the

more. At the long view of the sides, sometimes given to them by the opening of a door. And with every encounter I became more anxious to know more of them.

Now marveling at the odd coincidence which had made them so deeply interested in me, I shared the same day with myself for waiting for them. I watched their gradual approach till the slope of the bank concealed them from my view. In a minute after their water-stomach from the nook below the summer-house, and turning to the window, I saw them approach as if to seat themselves beneath the arched tree. Unwilling to play the part of eaves-dropper, I rose to quit the summer-house, but my steps were arrested for a few moments by the touching voice of the young widow. I hoped I was not doing very wrong in lingering, for I felt as if I could not bear myself away.

"Yes, Jane," she said to her sister—
"yes, let us sit here to-day. I never had

courage before, but this is so like *that* day, Jane! I feel as if I must come here, and sit upon this seat again."

"Marion, dearest," the elder began, in a tone of remonstrance.

"No, no, Jane; we need not try to cheat each other out of memory; we need not deprive ourselves of the solace of weeping together. There is no one at home, Jane, to be grieved by the sight of our pale cheeks and swollen eyes."

"No one! no one!" was uttered by Jane in a voice of such desolation, such hopeless sorrow, as wrung the very heart to hear. "No one to care for us, Marion; no one to grieve over our grief, or be comforted by our cheerfulness now. It is very true—we need not wear a mask to each other."

"And could we wear it here, Jane, where every step recalls what we have lost? And in this place, and to-day? Just such a day as this it was; and here we sat—and, oh!

how many, many a happy hour after that day! It was the last spot we visited before we went away: and we each plucked a little branch from the acacia to keep as a memorial. I have them both. How often did we look at them, till the picture of this sweet spot seemed to rise up before us! and how often did he pray that we both might live to sit here again! and I believe *he did*, Jane; I do believe God granted that prayer—I would not think otherwise. And now I have come to sit here! Oh, Arthur, Arthur!”

And with these words she cast herself, with the abandonment of a despairing child, upon the neck of her sister, and both “lifted up their voices and wept.”

My own eyes were overflowing, and I felt that I was unwarrantably intruding upon a scene of affliction too sacred for any eye but that of Heaven. I hastened from the summer-house, and met my friend not far from

it. She uttered an exclamation at sight of the tears which I could not control; and I explained, in a few words, their cause.

“ Ah!” she ejaculated, “ the poor young widow, Mrs. Arthur Stanley. The house-keeper told me, that she and poor Jane Stanley had been here all the morning, and in the house for a long while; I am so glad they did not meet us.”

“ They are sisters, are they not?” I asked.

“ Sisters-in-law, and almost more than sisters in affection. I shall tell you their story as we go home. Now, come, for I have obtained permission to show you the picture I mentioned.”

I entered the house with a new interest, finding it thus connected with these sweet mourners, over whose probable history I had so often pondered. It was one which must have been a paradise of domestic comfort in the days of its inhabitation, though

now, with its furniture displaced, piled up in heaps, and covered over for the sake of preservation, its echoing stairs and passages, and its empty apartments, it wore that aspect of desolation which always broods over the deserted dwellings of man, and which in the present instance was more painfully felt from the knowledge that this desolation had been produced by a series of domestic calamities.

The picture I had come to see was a very good one, and represented the late Mr. Stanley, his wife, and four children, two boys and two girls. Grouping, design, and colouring, combined to render it a beautiful painting, but an interest altogether independent of these seemed to invest this memento of "the former family"—all that now remained to recall the traces of them in the halls of their forefathers.

"Lack-a-day!" exclaimed the respectable elderly woman intrusted with the charge of

the house; "little did my good master think, the day that picture was hung up here, how soon it would be all that was left of him and his! Poor dear Mrs. Arthur, ma'am, and Miss Stanley, 'twould have moved a heart of stone to see them stand crying before it this morning. Thinks I to myself, many folks would have given it them, for sure there's nobody here to care for it. But 'tis what they calls a *hare-loom*, it seems, and that's a word that always comes in the way, like, when anything kind's to be done."

In the course of our homeward walk, my friend, as she had promised, gave me an account of the latter days of the Stanley family, which I shall now proceed to relate in more connected terms. It was one of those tales of blight and decay of which one sometimes hears, in which man is irresistibly impelled to the conviction that the hand of God, and that hand alone, is dealing

with him for its own mysterious purpose. Speaking as unsanctified humanity might be supposed to do, no reason could be discerned why this family should be thus afflicted, thus gradually extinguished from the face of the earth. They were, as my friend had said, good, kind, old-English hearts; an excellent race of men and women for generations, and the last owner of Helmsley Hall pre-eminently so in every relation of life. Yet these were taken, and others infinitely less deserving left; for God seeth not as man seeth, and it is not in general on this side of time that the just meet with their reward.

CHAPTER II.

THE late Mr. Stanley was, as the picture represented him, the father of two sons and two daughters, who all lived to grow up in vigorous youth around him. Of the daughters, Jane, the last survivor, was the elder by five years, ; the second brother, Arthur, coming between her and Lucy, a lovely, bright-eyed, joyous girl, the darling of the whole family. A young orphan relative, Marion Neville, exactly Lucy's age, had lived with them as a daughter of the house, from the period of attaining her fourteenth year, and, by people unacquainted with the

family history, was always taken for a third daughter, so perfect was the union amongst them, and so impartial the kindness shown her. A happier circle, or one more amiable, it was impossible to see, until its first trial occurred in the death of Mrs. Stanley, about eight years previous to the time at which I heard the story.

This blow, a dreadful one to all, sank most deeply on the heart of her surviving partner ; and from that period, Mr. Stanley felt his hold upon this world loosened, and, but for his children's sakes, would little have cared how soon the decree had gone forth which should send him to follow her. But the affectionate group around him, and their devoted care of his comforts, bound him to earth, and in them all his hopes and wishes centred.

Of his two sons, Arthur was perhaps, in secret, his father's favourite. Frederic, the elder, was a fine, warm-hearted young man,

and fondly attached to his family; but there was a degree of wilfulness and recklessness in his character calculated to alarm an anxious parent, not only on his own account, but for the sake of his sisters' happiness, should they henceforth be left to his guardianship. Arthur, on the contrary, to the energy and firmness without which the best qualities in a man are comparatively valueless, united a degree of tenderness and consideration for others, almost feminine in their total unselfishness; and in him his father reposed the most unbounded confidence. Their turn of mind, their taste, and pursuits, assimilated greatly, and a friendship more perfect between father and son could rarely be seen.

He must in truth have been a gallant and noble being, as my friend described him, and of an outward mien harmonising with his open, generous, kindly nature. I pictured him to myself, as she dwelt upon his bright

blue eye and beaming smile, his tall, graceful, athletic figure, and the frank, winning, irresistible cordiality of his address, till I could have fancied I beheld him at Marion's side—Marion as she must then have been—beneath the acacia tree where he first had told the love that had grown up between them since boy and girlhood, and thought what love it must have been, and what must now be the bitterness of her lonely sorrow.

True love indeed it was—earnest devoted love; and yet its course ran smooth; its *brief* course, for never let human heart reckon upon the long continuance of such. As surely as the shadow follows on the sun-beam, so surely must the cup of mortal happiness be dashed with bitterness; and those amongst us whose rare lot it has been to taste the draught only fit for heaven—the unmingled draught of love and joy—have never been permitted to do more than taste

it. The generous father offered no opposition to Arthur's choice, though Marion was portionless. He had, he said, long loved her as his child, and he knew his dear boy deserved her, and would make her happy. But he exacted a promise of delay until Arthur, who had embraced the military profession, for which he had shown a decided bent since boyhood, should have obtained his captain's commission, arrangements for the purchase of which had been made. A promise this not hard to give, nor hard to keep, living as Marion did in the bosom of such affection, cheered by such letters, and seeing Arthur whenever he could obtain leave of absence, even for a few days—if possible even more devoted to her for their separation.

So time glided on, and Marion was nineteen, and Arthur nearly twenty-three, when his commission was gazetted, and his regiment unexpectedly ordered to Bombay.

This was a cruel blow to all parties—to the father and sisters unutterably so. Even Marion, who would have followed Arthur to the world's end, felt as if her heart were rent in twain when she thought of leaving the beloved inhabitants of Helmsley, and leaving them so desolate. She had Arthur, but they would lose both. The young soldier himself, deeply as he felt the prospect of this long separation, still, full of the buoyant impulses of young life, and hope, and love, cheered them all, even in their own despite, by his undoubting anticipations for the future, and his perpetual dwelling on the time when they should meet again.

All from this time forth was hurry and bewilderment; Arthur and Marion were married in the old parish church of Helmsley, where long generations of Stanleys had been wedded and buried before them. A few days' wandering together among the

Welsh mountains—days in whose brief space the bliss of years seemed concentrated—a few weeks of troubled, feverish, grief-blended joy under their father's roof—and then all was over. The loving father and son, the brother and sisters who had never known an hour's anger or estrangement, parted to meet no more in this world; and Marion tore herself from the arms of those she loved so dearly, to follow him, who was now to be all the world to her.

From this time forth heavy clouds began to settle down upon Helmsley Hall. The sunshine that departed with Arthur and Marion never returned again. Even Lucy's joyous spirit drooped "like some lone bird without a mate" from the hour that severed her from Marion—her twin-sister, as she had been used fondly to call her. Jane Stanley had been, since very early womanhood, a subdued and pensive girl. Some story there was, of which no one knew any distinct par-

ticulars, of a blight of that nature which at once, and for life, breaks the spirits of a woman—a tale of young warm, trusting affection, basely trifled with, and flung back upon the heart which had written—

“ With its fiery rain
Wild words on dust.”

A common tale it is, but whatever had been its peculiar features in her case, its effects had been to sadden, not sour, her gentle nature; and a deeper shade of melancholy was all that could now be discerned of alteration in her demeanour. But upon Lucy the change was painful to see; and, alas! deeper and heavier sorrows soon followed in the train of the present. Frederic Stanley had of late caused much distress to his father. He had been much from home; had travelled long upon the continent; and at Florence had been led into an unfortunate intimacy with some men of rank and for-

tune belonging to what are called the *sporting* circles—that class of tourists who gain an unenviable notoriety abroad for themselves and their country. This intimacy, and the tastes resulting from it, continued after his return home; and about a year from the time of Arthur's departure, Mr. Stanley found himself compelled—to save his son from dishonour—to pay racing debts for him to a very large amount. Not only was this in itself an acute pang to a man of Mr. Stanley's high-toned principles, but a serious trouble in another point of view. His large property being strictly entailed, it was not in his power to burden it with an adequate provision for his younger children. Their mother's fortune, fifteen thousand pounds, was settled in equal shares upon them; but, anxious to augment it, he had for years laid by an annual sum to accumulate for their behoof. Most unfortunately this was not done on the now uni-

versal plan of effecting an insurance on his own life—which in those days was not so well understood as at present—and the payment of Frederic's debts reduced it to a mere trifle. That generous, though imprudent young man, stung to the heart by remorse for the consequences of his misconduct to his sisters and brother, and the degree to which he perceived the subject prey upon his father's mind, formed many resolutions of amendment and of future compensation to them, came down to Helmsley, and there remained quietly for several months, to the manifest improvement of the cheerfulness and comfort of the household. Mr. Stanley now began to entertain sanguine hopes of his son's future steadiness, and to look with less despondency on the prospects of his daughters. But the hand of the destroying angel was stretched forth against his house.

Frederic Stanley was a rash and daunt-

less equestrian, and to divert his leisure in the country, had undertaken the task of breaking a high-spirited young horse. With his characteristic wilfulness and contempt of danger, he persisted, in spite of the remonstrances of the old groom—the experienced head of the stable department—in taking this animal out of the park and along the high road long before that functionary considered it safe to do so. The impunity of several days' trial augmented his daring into utter recklessness; and one morning, having had the horse as usual brought to the door; he galloped off in the wildest spirits, with many laughing injunctions to the old man to come in a short while and look for his body at the foot of Barnham Rise, a steep and dangerous height, down the face of which the road to ——— wound in those days.

Jane and Lucy were standing on the terrace, near enough to the front of the house

to see and hear all that passed ; and both at the same moment were struck by a peculiar look and ominous shake of the head with which the old groom gazed after his young master as these parting words died away in the clatter of the headlong speed with which he darted off. "I likes no such jests," they heard him mutter to himself as he turned from the door. Both sisters afterwards averred that at that instant the most deadly sinking of the heart fell upon them. They left the terrace as if by mutual consent, re-entered the drawing-room, and sat down to their usual occupations in silence. Three hours after, Lucy rose from her chair, came up to Jane, and laid a hand upon hers whose marble coldness made her start.

"Jane," gasped she, in a choking voice, "I—I wish Frederic were come home."

"So do I, Lucy," whispered Jane, vainly trying to control the nervous trembling

which shook her from head to foot. "How cold it is!" she ejaculated, after a minute's pause, crouching down towards the fire. "Lucy, darling, it is foolish in us to frighten ourselves so; how often have we seen Frederic ride off in that wild way and return quite—"

The word was arrested on her lips by the slow opening of the drawing-room door. Both sisters started to their feet, and stood gazing at it as though they had expected the entrance of a spectre. And more like a spectre than a living man was he who now, unannounced, stood before them. It was Sir Henry Monthermer, their nearest neighbour and intimate friend, in full hunting costume, splashed from head to foot, his face pale as a corpse, and manifestly, in spite of his utmost efforts, trembling in every limb.

Lucy sank upon a chair. Jane advanced a step. "Tell me at once, Sir Henry," she

said, in a hoarse whisper, "tell me what it is."

"My dear Miss Stanley," exclaimed Sir Henry, taking her hand

The old housekeeper and several of the other female servants were clustered near the door in tears. Suddenly a shriek resounded within the drawing-room, so wild, so piercing, as nothing but the very height of agony can wring from the stricken heart. The bell rang furiously, and the women rushed in. They found Sir Henry Monthermer supporting the insensible form of Lucy. Jane was on her knees by her sister's chair, her hands locked together, her face white as marble, her tearless eyes distended, and her bosom heaving almost to suffocation.

"Where is my poor father?" she gasped out as the servants entered.

"Dr. Willis is with my master, ma'am, in the library," whispered the housekeeper, advancing.

"Take care of *her*, Mrs. Peters, I must go to papa."

She rose from her knees and leaned for a minute against a chair.

"Dear Miss Stanley, do not attempt it," Sir Henry anxiously exclaimed.

"*I must*," said Jane, "I am quite able. I must go to my father."

Over the anguish of that dreadful day I draw a veil. What language could picture it? Too fearfully true had been poor Frederic's wild words. At the head of Barnham Rise the hounds, in full cry, had burst from the woods, and crossed the road directly before him, followed by a large field of sportsmen. The young horse, already excited by the speed at which he had been going, became utterly ungovernable; a fierce contest ensued; he reared, he plunged, he sprang with all his four feet into the air, but the undaunted rider kept his seat. At last he dashed frantically down the steep

descent. A sharp turn occurred near its foot; the maddened animal ran full against the wall which fenced it, the concussion struck him bleeding to the earth, and pitched his unfortunate master right over the wall upon his head. The horror-struck spectators galloped to his assistance. In a few seconds a dozen hands were raising him; but the speed of lightning could have brought no help to him. His neck was broken, and his death had been instantaneous. That very afternoon, the old groom, with the other sorrowing servants of his father's house, repaired to Barnham Rise, thence to bear home the lifeless remains of him who had that morning, in the exuberance of youthful daring, uttered the unconscious prophecy of his own fate.

This awful termination to the career of his erring, wayward, but most attaching son, proved the father's death-blow. He never recovered from the shock, which for a time,

by its very excess of horror, seemed to have deadened him to the faculty of suffering; but whose fatal effects became daily more perceptible. It was long too ere poor Lucy arose, the shadow of her former self, from the sick bed on which the same cause had laid her prostrate. While Jane was saved, by the absolute necessity for exertion, from similar bodily sufferings, it may be doubted whether the repressed misery, the stifled anguish of her heart, were not more dreadful than theirs, from the very circumstance of their not re-acting upon her health, and so leaving her faculties in all their unimpaired intensity. Desolate indeed would have been her situation, but for the unfailing, almost parental kindness and attention of Dr. Willis, the Rector of the parish, her father's bosom friend since their college days; and who, upon this terrible occasion, thought, felt, and acted for all. It was he who took upon himself the task of ap-

prising Arthur of what had occurred ; and to whom Mr. Stanley, as soon as he was able to think collectedly of anything, delegated the office of writing to urge upon his only surviving son the necessity for taking immediate steps to leave the army, that he might come home to close the eyes which his father felt had well-nigh looked their last upon this world, and to afford a home and protection to his sisters. It was sickening to reflect on the length of time which must elapse ere Arthur could receive and act upon the letter ; for India was indeed in those days a banishment, to a degree which in *ours* we have nearly learned to forget.'

Frederic Stanley met his death early in the month of February ; and about the middle of the following June, his father lay upon his death-bed. Mr. Stanley's decay was gradual, and latterly almost painless—more a sinking of the vital powers, than positive disease, and soothed to himself and

those around him by the most humble spirit of resignation to the will of God, and undoubting trust in the atonement of the Saviour. One thought alone remained to trouble the serenity of his departing soul. He had committed his poor girls to the Father of the fatherless, he had them ever in his sight, he knew them to be safe at home, and trusted their future with confidence to their affectionate brother; but that brother, where was he? how was it with him then? Could he but see Arthur, could he but embrace his dear boy once more, he would die in peace. This he repeated incessantly. It is true the letters from Arthur and Marion were unfailing in their arrival; their family had missed none, and had never been harassed by long delays in their correspondence; but they were all inevitably of such old dates, so many things might have occurred since they were

written, that it could only be a very imperfect joy to receive them at any time, and much more at the present. The longings of the father's heart were unappeasable, and could not be controlled.

CHAPTER III.

It was a beautiful moonlight evening after a day of burning heat. Not a leaf was stirring; the rich foliage of the old trees round Helmsley Hall hung down in heavy, motionless masses, casting their dark shadows on the silvered turf. The atmosphere was odoriferous with flower-scents, and in the perfect stillness, the plashing of the fountain in the pleasance came low and musically on the ear. The fragrant scents, the sweet murmur of the falling water stole into the chamber of the dying man, where a window had been left open to admit the

air, and where, in solemn stillness, his daughters knelt beside his bed to partake the Holy Communion with him for the last time.

The sacred rite was over; and shortly after Jane and Lucy left their father, at his request, a little while alone with his faithful friend. They stole softly into the dressing-room which opened from his apartment, and seated themselves in one of the windows which looked out into an angle of the old house, at the end of the terrace nearest the front. The other window commanded the entrance, the square court edged by evergreens, with its broad gravel sweep, its lofty iron gates, and part of the approach beyond.

The sisters sat in total silence, each fearing to trust her voice in words, each with her arm twined round the other, and Lucy's head laid upon the shoulder of Jane. They did not look out into the lovely moonlight—

they could not bear the misery of its contrast with their own feelings—the peace, the repose, the fulness of beauty and sweetness without, the aching, bleeding, sinking hearts within. Suddenly a distant sound struck upon their ears. Both started, raised their heads, and held their breath to listen. It came swiftly on, nearer and nearer—more and more distinct—the sound of a carriage and horses, driving rapidly up the approach.

“Who—who *can* it be?” murmured Lucy.
“O Jane, if it were possible”

They could neither of them rise from their seats to look out; the very intensity of suspense chained them down. On, on it came; they could distinguish the grinding of the wheels upon the gravel, the rapid beat of the horses’ hoofs; at last it dashed round the sweep, and came to a stop at the front door.

Both sisters sprang to their feet, rushed

to the window, threw it open, and leaned out. There was *nothing* below ! The moonlight disclosed the minutest objects as distinctly as day, and not a moving thing was visible. The court lay still, and calm, and vacant beneath their eyes.

In stupified silence they gazed out for some minutes, then drawing back their heads, fixed their eyes on each other's pale and awe-struck countenances.

"Were we dreaming?" said Jane; "we *both* heard it?"

A low murmur of voices in the hall below caught their ears. Softly opening a door which communicated with the principal staircase, they advanced into the passage, and leant over the balustrade to listen. The sounds proceeded from several of the servants, who had apparently hurried into the hall to open the door upon hearing the carriage wheels.

"They have heard it too, Jane," whis-

pered Lucy. "Hush! do you hear what they are saying?"

The servants were talking eagerly, though in subdued tones, amongst themselves, all affirming that the same sounds had reached them in different parts of the house, and exclaiming in terror and astonishment at the unaccountable circumstance. The voice of Mrs. Peters was then audible, enjoining silence, and the others dispersed, the old butler lingering a minute behind.

"Mrs. Peters," the sisters heard him say, "I fear we shall have sad hearts before the night be over. You know *what* it was we heard just now."

"Aye, too well, too well, Mr. Jones," was Mrs. Peters' reply—and her voice seemed choked by weeping. "I was a girl when the old squire died—our master's father—but well do I remember all the neighbours talking of it; and my aunt, who was housekeeper at the hall in those days,

has told me many a time how the sound, as it were, of a carriage and four seemed to come up from the lodge at the dead of the night, till the whole house heard it drive up to the front entrance and stop; and how the men all hurried to open the door—for no one had gone to bed, the squire's death being hourly expected—and not a living thing was there, horse nor carriage—no, nor the track of a wheel, nor a hoof-mark on the gravel, for the night was dark, and they took out torches to look, and how old John Waters, who had been about the hall, man and boy, well nigh seventy years, and had seen three generations of the family, shook his head where he sat in his chair by the fireside, and told them they might spare their pains, for no mark of *that* carriage or horses would they discover. He had heard it before; it always foreshadows the death of the head of the family.”

The cold hands of the sisters were tightly

clasped together, as they listened to these words, which seemed to embody the half-formed emotions of awe and fear that possessed them. Clinging closely to each other, they stole back in shuddering silence to the room they had quitted, and almost screamed when a few minutes after the door from their father's room was softly opened.

It was Dr. Willis who appeared, and beckoned them to enter. They approached their father's bed. Even in the brief space of their absence a change had come over his countenance—a strange and unaccustomed expression. His eyes were fixed upon them as they bent over him with a gaze of unutterable love and sorrow.

“Kiss me, my darling girls,” said the dying man. “God bless you, my dear, good, dutiful children! God bless and protect you! My poor Arthur! my little Marion! If I could but have seen them again! But *His* holy will be done! You will give them my blessing, Jane.”

These were the last connected words audible to his sobbing daughters. He lay back upon the pillows of his bed, his eyes half closed, the *last* dread sound—the death rattle—already beginning in his throat.

“Let us pray!” said the voice of Dr. Willis. Jane and Lucy dropped upon their knees by the bedside, and without the half-opened door of the dressing-room Mr. Stanley’s old faithful valet, Mrs. Peters, and Jones, were seen kneeling, while the solemn commendatory prayer for the dying arose from the chamber of death to speed the departing soul.

The service closed in a stillness only broken by the half-suffocating sobs of the two sisters. Suddenly the dying father sprang up erect, his eyes fixed upon some object which appeared to be visible to him at the foot of his bed, his arms outstretched, and his whole countenance illuminated by a smile of the most ineffable rapture.

"*Arthur!*" he exclaimed in a clear and joyous voice. And even as the beloved name escaped his lips, his arms dropped, he fell gently back, and expired without a struggle.

The wedded happiness of Arthur and Marion Stanley—happiness in each other as perfect as ever was bestowed on humanity—had been, if possible, confirmed and strengthened within a year after their marriage by the birth of a son; the intelligence of which event reaching Helmsley about two months previous to the death of Frederic, had caused the last strong emotion of joy and thankfulness which had visited the hearts of any there. But five or six weeks before the fatal termination of Mr. Stanley's illness, a letter had arrived from poor Marion addressed to Jane, announcing the death of her baby after a few days' illness. These tidings the medical men in attendance

strongly urged upon Jane the necessity of concealing from her father. Even then they did not hide from her how faint were their hopes of his restoration to health; and, as they truly said, it would be a needless pang to inflict upon him. He died in ignorance that his infant grandson had been recalled from the parents who for five happy months had so rejoiced in his dawning loveliness, intelligence, and apparent strength; but many a tear did Jane and Lucy shed over Marion's touching detail of the illness and death of her little darling. She told how she and Arthur had sat beside his cot when all hope was over, and watched the film of death stealing over those sweet blue eyes which had looked so brightly and lovingly into theirs, and kissed the soft cheek so often pillowed on their hearts, and with each kiss felt it become colder and colder, till all was over, and the pure spirit gone back to God; and how they had watched all night beside

his little coffin weeping and praying for grace to resign him without murmuring; and in the morning had taken the last look, the last kiss, and parted with him for ever in this world. She described the desolation of the house, the horrible stillness, the blank around her; the wandering into her baby's room, with a vague expectation of something to relieve the craving sense of *want* at her heart; and the start, the shock, the horrible tide of recollection awakened by the sight of the empty cot. She told how she had collected and put by with her own hands everything belonging to him—his clothes, his little playthings, the veriest trifle connected in her mind with him, and how she did it with dry eyes that could not shed a tear, and a choking sense of suffocation at her heart, till she came upon a rattle with which she had been amusing him the day before his fatal illness began, and at the sight of it her baby's smiling face as he hid

it in her bosom, and then looked slyly up at her, arose once more before her eyes, and she sat down and wept till she could weep no more.

Marion detailed all this and more in the fulness of a woman's heart, which must have woman's sympathy in its woes ; but she detailed her consolations as well ; she dwelt upon Arthur's tenderness, his devotedness, his total forgetfulness of self ; told how he had checked his own agonizing sobs over the lifeless form of his first-born to whisper comfort to her ; how he had thought of her, felt for her, with more than feminine sympathy ; and she said with truth that this hard trial seemed, if possible, to have drawn them more closely together ; that she had never known all that Arthur was to her until she had clung to him by the death-bed of her baby. And months rolled on with them, and brought calmness, resignation, and even returning sensations of happiness ; for

they became daily more and more to each other, and little did they guess how those very months were passing at home.

It was now near the end of June—the rainy season — and everything around Poonah, where Arthur's regiment was stationed, was at its greenest and most beautiful, when one evening he and Marion rode out on horseback, as was their daily custom before sunset. An unusual cloud of sadness had hung all day on Arthur's brow, and the first mile or two of their ride passed almost in silence. At length they found themselves on a solitary and beautiful road, and one to which they were frequently in the habit of resorting ; when Arthur, checking his horse's speed, laid his hand on the pommel of Marion's saddle, and so they proceeded at a foot pace.

" Marion, dearest," he said, " do you know I had a very extraordinary dream last night, or rather early this morning. It has

haunted me this whole day, and I must tell it you, though at first I thought I should not."

"Why not tell me, Arthur?" exclaimed she. "I was sure something was the matter, and was just going to ask you what it was. Let me hear it, dearest."

"I was afraid of making you uneasy, my own darling," replied her husband; "but I cannot keep anything secret from you, I find. Well, then, my dream began—I cannot tell how, for there was much confusion in it, but the pervading fancy was that I was wandering alone through strange solitary places where I could not discover my way. At last I found myself in the lime-walk beside the lake at Helmsley. The rest of the dream was singularly vivid, and its minutest details are, as it were, distinctly *painted* before me. I never had so life-like a dream, or one which I remembered so perfectly. It appeared to me a beautiful

moonlight night, very much as it was likely to be in reality at this season ; bright moonlight, showing every object distinctly. I walked up the lake to *our* seat, Marion, our own dear seat below the acacia, of which I have often dreamt, but never half so vividly before. There was the very spot before me just as we saw it last ; the light, graceful branches bending over it as when we plucked the leaves to take away with us. I sat down and said to myself, 'Thank God that I have lived to see this place once more.'

" It seemed to me that you, dearest, were not far off, and that I was to wait for you there ; but, with the usual inconsistency of dreams, I felt no surprise or uneasiness at your non-appearance. I sat with my eyes fixed upon the branches flickering against the moonlight sky with an indescribable sensation of peace and tranquillity pervading my mind. How long this lasted I cannot tell, but suddenly the scene changed, and I

found myself ascending the staircase at the hall. I went up and on till I reached the door of my father's room. There were lights within; the curtains were drawn at the foot of the bed, but left open at the sides. On that nearest the door Jane and Lucy were kneeling and weeping bitterly. I did not see Frederic, but Dr. Willis knelt by the head of the bed with an open prayer-book in his hand. I advanced to the foot, drew the curtains aside, and looked in. There lay my father, Marion, as if dying, supported by pillows, and apparently nearly insensible. But at the instant I opened the curtain he started up, with his eyes fixed upon me, stretched out his arms, and with a look—such a look! so full of joy! I see it now!—he exclaimed '*Arthur*;' then, as suddenly fell back lifeless on his pillow. This is all I recollect. I fancy I awoke directly after. But was it not a strange dream, Marion?"

"Very, very strange!" exclaimed Marion.

"Oh! Arthur, I wish we had letters from England."

"Long, long it will be ere we have letters up to that date," said Arthur. "It may seem weakness, Marion, but I own I shall not be easy until we have. I cannot tell you how the extraordinary minuteness of that dream haunts me. I have made a memorandum of the date and of the hour, which, making allowance for the difference of time, must have been about eleven at night there. Time will show whether or not it were more than a mere imagination."

Time! alas! the sands of time were well nigh run out for him, to whom, as it afterwards turned out, when Marion related to her sisters the particulars of this forgotten dream, a mysterious communication with his father's departing spirit had been thus strangely permitted; for the date and the hour exactly corresponded with those of Mr. Stanley's death.

One morning about a week after this time, Arthur (who, in the course of some regimental duty, had been exposed the previous day to a drenching fall of rain, after having been violently heated) complained of illness. Alarmed by his looks, and by a complaint from him, for his usual habit was to make light of any feeling of indisposition, Marion instantly despatched a messenger for the regimental surgeon; but even before he could reach the house, it was plain that her husband's was no trivial disorder. The case proved to be one of internal inflammation, and defied all that care and skill could do to arrest its fatal progress.

Twenty-four hours—hours in whose brief space were concentrated a whole lifetime of misery—did Marion hang over his couch, in vain endeavours to assuage the agony of that dread strife betwixt life and death, in the vigorous frame of young manhood, till all hope was over; and in the interval of

ease from suffering immediately preceding dissolution, she bent her ear to listen to the whispered words of his last farewell; the words that bade her look for comfort to the Redeemer, on whom his humble trust was stayed; the words of love, of tenderness, of bitter anguish for her whom he was leaving behind him so desolate, tempered by the faith which looked forward to their eternal re-union :—

“ Marion, my own beloved wife ! we shall meet again.”

These were the last audible sounds that escaped his lips; and then his eyes remained fixed on her, his hands clasped hers, till those bright and loving eyes grew dim and glazed, those faithful hands stiffened in her grasp, and the kind, the upright, the noble heart of Arthur Stanley ceased to beat.

He died at early morning—the glorious hour of an Indian morning at that season—with clouds of incense steaming up from the

green earth, and the unfolding flowers, to hail the rising sun ; a scene of beauty and of splendour without—how fearfully contrasting with the scene within. And all that long bright day did Marion sit in the darkened room, beside the bed, in tearless, voiceless desolation. There were some gentle hearts of her own sex near her, who had flown to her help on hearing of her calamity, and many male friends, for all his brother officers had loved and honoured Arthur, and nowhere are the claims of our sorrowing fellow-beings so quickly felt, and responded to by so much of active kindness, as in India ; but no one ventured to intrude upon her last watch by the dead.

She sat alone and silent. She could neither weep nor pray—scarcely even *feel*, beyond the stifling sense of some unutterable weight of woe. The only sign of consciousness she evinced was in a convulsive start whenever the different bugle calls, which

mark the passage of the day in a military cantonment, pierced the air with their melancholy wailing notes. Similar notes had fallen on her ear at intervals through the agonising hours of the previous day, and who that has suffered requires to be told of the strength of association connected with musical sounds? Often heard before, but never heard *as then*, from that time forth, what unknown depths of anguish were stirred by their recurrence within her soul !

The long bright day was nearly over, and with it was departing the last, last shadow of his presence, who had, but a few brief hours before, gone forth to enjoy just such another evening, in health and vigour, by her side. Short is the interval between life and death everywhere—shortest of all in India ; and yet more awfully short the interval between death and the grave. Ere sunset that evening was the dust to be given back to dust. And Marion took her last

look, her last kiss, of Arthur, and with that last kiss came rushing on her heart the memory of the first—the memory of that summer noon when they sat together beneath the acacia tree.

That memory thawed the icy chain which seemed to bind down her heart; and as a kind and pitying hand gently loosened the convulsive grasp with which her arms were clinging round the coffin, she sank upon the now vacant pillow, in a burst of hysteric agony which saved her reason from giving way; and after a time—a long time, when she was kindly and wisely left again alone, she arose and went unto her Father, fell upon her knees by her husband's deathbed, and prayed.

“I remember no circumstance,” said my friend, when her narrative had reached this climax; “I remember no circumstance which caused so universal a sensation as the tidings of Arthur Stanley's death did in this

neighbourhood. Such an event, so dreadful, so entirely unexpected, so annihilating to the poor sisters, whose only consolation since the deaths of their father and elder brother, had been derived from the anticipations of their re-union with Arthur and his wife. Oh! it was fearful even to think of what their sensations must be in hearing it! The coldest-hearted were moved to pity, and those who really knew and loved them lamented almost as for a brother of their own. And he was so universally beloved, and precisely one of those beings with whom one cannot connect the idea of death, scarcely even of sorrow, so full of bright, joyous, energetic life. Amid all possible contingencies, *this* never had occurred to any one, and the effect of its announcement was stunning, bewildering. Never shall I forget it. There was one universal gush of sorrow and sympathy. But what could any human sympathy avail in

such a case ? And there was more even than the present burden of affliction involved in this direful calamity. The sisters would awake from the first stupefaction of grief to find themselves and their brother's young widow compelled to quit the home of their childhood, and go forth into the desolate world to seek another. This, the miserable result of an entail upon the male line, must be the consequence of Arthur's dying childless. Had the poor baby lived they would at least have been spared the anguish of leaving Helmsley. And in consequence of Frederic's unfortunate involvements, their portion of worldly goods would be but small to those accustomed as they had been to wealth and ease ; whilst poor Marion, in the absence of any legal provision for an event, at the time of her marriage, so seemingly improbable as her husband's succeeding to the property, would augment their united means only by Arthur's share of his mother's

fortune, and her pension as his widow. Not that they were any of them capable at this period of a thought connected with such topics; but these considerations occurring to all who were interested in their fate, augmented, if anything could, the sorrow felt for them. The heir of entail, Mr. Cressingham Stanley, a distant relation whom they had never seen, was known to be an extravagant needy spendthrift, who had married an heiress, of whose possessions he retained little save the name he had assumed on their account, and the incumbrance of a house and grounds too extensive for his means. No kindness or assistance was to be expected from him towards his unfortunate young relations; and in truth it was well that nothing *was* expected, as his subsequent unfeeling conduct has proved. Never was any household made desolate by a more melancholy tissue of domestic calamities; and the extinction of the good old line of the Stanleys

was felt by rich and poor as a public misfortune."

I inquired how the sisters bore the announcement of their brother's death.

"At first," replied my friend, "I suppose it was hard to say on which the shock fell most killingly; I know no particulars, for except Dr. Willis, no one saw them. Even Lady Monthermer, one of their most intimate female friends, did not for some time, and indeed made no effort to do so, feeling, as every delicate mind must do, that deep sorrow is best left to itself at first. I myself had always been on very intimate and affectionate terms with the Stanleys, but I never dreamt of intruding upon them until I received a message from Jane to say that she should like to see me. I went immediately; and never shall I forget our meeting. It was not only the uncontrollable agitation, of an intensity which I have seldom experienced, which rendered it so memorable,

but it was the shock, the shock which I could scarcely disguise, with which I beheld Lucy Stanley, and which instantly brought to my heart the conviction that yet another bereavement was in store for her poor sister ; that the work of the destroyer was not finished in that devoted family. Wasted to a shadow, pale, *white*, as marble, save for a deep pink spot burning on each cheek, her blue eyes so unnaturally large, so bright, not even dimmed by all the tears they had shed ; her hair, which used to curl naturally, clinging in damp, heavy masses round her hollow temples ; the very expression of her countenance, an earnest, *anxious* look which I cannot describe in words, but which you will understand if you ever happened to see any one dying of a lingering disease—all told me at a glance that her doom was sealed, and I could scarce command voice or words to go through our interview, even after its first emotions were calmed, with tolerable com-

posure. Poor, poor Lucy! how often one sees these bright, gay, joyous beings sink at once, and utterly, beneath the pressure of affliction! and theirs was such an accumulated burden. Sorrow had been so alien to her happy nature, it was like an untimely frost killing some beautiful delicate flower. Jane, who had been early tried, early schooled in the woman's lesson, 'to suffer and be still,' had been so, doubtless, in the mysterious discipline which proportions all our trials to the part assigned us in this life, and educates us, as it were, both for time and eternity. Her part was, and is, to live for others; to repress her own sorrows for their sakes, to exert her energies for them; yes, and to find—or there is no truth in the promises of the Gospel—peace for her own wounded spirit, in its humble submission and self-forgetting devotedness.

“I found Jane preparing to leave home for a purpose which she could scarcely com-

mand her feelings sufficiently to tell me. She was about to proceed to Liverpool, there to await the arrival of the Indiaman in which Marion had taken her passage home, and which was looked for in a few days. Agonising as the effort was, she was resolved to make it. She could not bear the idea of her poor young sister landing among strangers, or receiving from any lips but hers the tidings of which she must arrive in ignorance, that she was returning, a mourner to the house of mourning, and had no longer a father's home left to shelter her. 'The small comfort,' she said, 'that *her* presence could bring her, Marion should not lose through any selfish shrinking from trial on her part. Kind, good Dr. Willis insisted on accompanying her, and Lucy, who'—here her voice faltered still more—'who was not equal to the fatigue and agitation, was anxious for her to go, and quite content to be left under Mrs. Peters' careful nursing.'

“She departed accordingly, and during the ten days of her absence I went constantly to see Lucy, who seemed to find comfort in my visits. From many things she said to me I drew the conclusion that she herself was perfectly sensible of her own approaching death. She never said it in so many words; I think she had not nerve to utter what must involve the idea of such added suffering to the survivors; but for herself, in so far as she was concerned, the bitterness of death was over to her young and gentle heart, and she was resigned to go. I never saw her after that time, and I never shall forget her as I saw her last. It was the day before that on which her sisters were expected home; she was nervous, agitated, and excited to a great degree, and welcomed my visit as a relief from her own thoughts; so that I remained longer than usual with her, until the darkening of the short November afternoon warned me to be gone. I had

bidden her farewell, and left her in the sitting-room which was then in daily use—that sweet little old-fashioned apartment which you may remember my pointing out to you, opening from the drawing-room and looking out upon the terrace. As I was crossing the large, empty, deserted room beyond, a sudden impulse prompted me to return for a moment to the door of that I had quitted, and look once more upon its inmate. She had sunk back in the large easy chair which she occupied, her eyes closed, her small, white, attenuated hands laid listlessly upon her lap, making a mournful contrast with her mourning garments, and through the gathering gloom her form, in its languid repose, looked almost death-like. All was so still, so dark around her, that I almost shuddered as I looked in; when suddenly the setting sun, which had been sinking unperceived behind heavy, murky clouds, struggling through them for a space

ere he disappeared, cast a bright beam full upon the window opposite her seat, and her golden hair and pallid brow became lighted up, and encircled, as it were, with a glory. It seemed—it *was*—a light from Heaven, an earnest of that better light which should brighten the valley of the shadow of death. I gazed upon the lovely vision, and turned away with a heart full of sadness, yet full of consoling thoughts. How often have I recalled that moment, and how often rejoiced that such, so holy, so beautiful, should be my last recollection of that sweet dying girl!

“Jane and Marion arrived at the hall late on the afternoon of the following day; another gloomy November day—calm, dark, and still, without a breath of wind to stir the boughs whence the withered leaves were stealing quietly down. I remember thinking it a seasonable day for such a return. Her heart, who had left these woods a happy

bride little more than two years before, in all the pomp and glory of summer, was even more altered, more withered than they, and not like them to revive again. Bright sunshine and green glancing boughs would have seemed, as the loveliness of nature often does seem in this sad world, a mockery of its woe. I could turn my thoughts to no other subject that day than the dreary, the unutterably dreary arrival of that young creature at the once happy home whence she had departed so full of hope and joy, and the dreadful meeting between the three bereaved mourners who were so soon to be driven from that home, still so dear even in its desolation. I pictured it to myself in all its particulars, with all the torrent of memories that would rush in to aggravate its bitterness, yet I have no doubt the reality far transcended any imagination of mine.

“It happened that I was then about to leave home on a visit to some friends in the

north, and when I returned at Christmas time the Stanleys had quitted the Hall. Their departure, already necessitated by the cruel, indecent eagerness shewn by Mr. Cressingham Stanley to receive possession of the premises, had been hastened by the increased illness of Lucy, and the advice of her medical attendant to remove her to Devonshire ere the severity of winter set in. Leaving, therefore, to the agent who had for many years conducted business for their father the charge of breaking up their establishment, and delivering over to the new owner all to which he could lay claim, and to Mrs. Peters and the old steward that of removing all belonging to themselves, they set off with as little delay as possible for Torquay, attended by the faithful Jones, who positively refused to leave his young mistresses, and I have no doubt will end his days in their service. What must have been their sensations in departing thus from Helmsley!

“And now there is little more to tell. Lucy Stanley lingered through the winter and died in early spring; but upwards of a year elapsed from the period of her death, ere the survivors returned hither and established themselves in the house where they live at present. It was a little before this time twelvemonth they returned; and when I went to call on them, I saw Marion for the first time. I found her altered indeed—still lovely, but so unlike, so totally changed from the beautiful blooming girl whom I had last beheld, as I well remembered, walking on the terrace at the hall, in all the pretty consciousness of a young bride, leaning on the arm of her handsome, animated, happy husband. It was but four summers since; but forty winters have passed over the heads of many, and left them less completely bankrupt in all that makes the difference between age and youth in the heart. Yet there was

no sullenness, no gloom or bitterness in her state of feeling.

Blessedly for herself, Marion's is one of those lowly-minded, gentle, child-like natures, in which there is no rebellion against the chastisements of Providence. Sorrow has broken her spirit—not chafed it—and she has acknowledged a Father's hand in all. It is a most touching thing to see how she clings to Jane, and how the two, left as they are, alone on earth, seem every day more closely drawn to each other—but not selfishly so; they are not absorbed in their own griefs to the exclusion of sympathy for their fellow creatures. If they shrink from mingling in general society, and feel that with the lighter scenes of this life they can henceforth have nothing in common, they are to be heard of wherever there is want or sorrow to alleviate; and they always welcome the visits of their old friends, and manifest a warm interest in all that concerns

them, which shows that they have not yielded to the exclusiveness of feeling apt to be engendered by brooding over private afflictions. Many people wondered at their choosing to return to this neighbourhood, but I thought I could perfectly understand the feeling which prompted it. So long as Mr. Cressingham Stanley had remained at Helmsley I can believe they would not willingly have done so; but that gentleman, after a few months' residence at the Hall, during which he must have perceived himself to be exceedingly unpopular in the neighbourhood, pronounced the place dull and detestable, and removed his family once more to his wife's property in ——shire, which I lately heard of their having left for the continent. He tried to let the Hall, but failed to find a tenant, and now he is cutting down timber so far as permitted by the entail—which fortunately protects all within a wide circuit of the mansion—and allowing

everything to go to ruin. Thus poor Jane and Marion have at all times access to the grounds and the house, and their walks thither generally end, they tell me, in the cottage near the village, to which their good old friend, Mrs. Peters, has retired to spend the remainder of her days ; with her to indulge in the melancholy luxury of talking and weeping over the past. They fixed their residence in the town of —, they say, instead of the country, partly because there was no country residence to be had within so easy a distance of the Hall, but still more for the sake of living close by the Cathedral. It is impossible—both sisters have often told me—to express the soothing, consoling, sanctifying influence they have derived from the service there ; the relief it has repeatedly afforded them from the pressure of bitter thoughts, or the degree to which it seems to temper the fitful fever of this earthly life with the peace and

repose of the heavenly. I have often wished that those who entertain a mistrust of the feelings excited by our sublime church music could hear the testimony in its favour borne by those whose own experience certainly has qualified them to speak upon the subject. I think they would be compelled to admit that there may be a class of feelings not in themselves entirely devotional, but which in their intensity and their purity, above all, in their elevation above the littleness of earthly things, are calculated to lead the soul from earth towards heaven; and that whatever has a tendency to excite and cherish such feelings cannot in itself be otherwise than good. A heart so crushed beneath a load of sorrow that the voice of speech, though uttered by the best and wisest of men, would fall on the ear in vain, may yet be reached by the power of music—touched, softened, and won to thoughts of calmness and submission. Surely it is not

well to seek to dispense with so potent an auxiliary."

Thus closed the narrative of my friend; and after hearing it, it may be conceived with what added feelings of interest I revisited Helmsley Hall, which I did again more than once in her company; while those who possess a natural bent towards the dreaming and the visionary will understand how it was that the seat beneath the acacia, and the room in which Mr. Stanley had died, should have been the two spots which I most particularly loved to haunt, connected as they were in my mind with one of those mysteries which in this world do sometimes occur to baffle all the matter-of-fact explanations of the most severely rational philosophers, and whose *real* explanation we shall never come at till we reach that place where all the mysteries that now encompass our being shall be made plain.

During the remainder of my stay at ——

I more than once accompanied my friend in her visits to Mrs. and Miss Stanley, and found them all that she had represented—

“—— Souls, by force of sorrows high
Uplifted to the purest sky
Of undisturbed humanity.”

CHAPTER II.

BRIEF as the space of our acquaintance had been, neither she nor they were creatures to be forgotten, and I sorrowed deeply on leaving them, when the time arrived for my departure. Yet I consoled myself by the idea, that, as the hospitable family whom I had been visiting pressed me warmly to return again, I should certainly do so, and should then find this attractive acquaintance ripen into intimacy. But the trite old saying, "Man proposes and God disposes," which meets with new exemplification every day, was not belied in this instance.

Events, at that time totally unexpected, occurred to alter all my plans and prospects soon after my return home, and it was only last year, that, having shortly before returned from a lengthened residence abroad, I once more found myself at ——. Amid all the changes which I beheld on my return to England—changes which, in the space of a few years, have transformed the whole outward aspect of the country, and perhaps have not done much less to alter its moral features, this ancient and somewhat secluded place had preserved more of its former character than any I had as yet revisited.

It is true that a railroad had made its way thither, and that in consequence the fine old Cathedral had become a *Lion* for tourists during the summer months; but upon the whole, beyond the inevitable alteration in habits and modes of thinking, consequent upon the rising up of a new generation amongst its inhabitants, I found matters

proceeding in a manner wonderfully resembling that of eighteen years ago; and it gave me a sensation of peace and repose to turn from the feverish turmoil of the accelerated speed at which everybody I had as yet met with, appeared to be hurrying through life, to the still, untroubled quiescence of the Cathedral Close, and the holy and venerable associations entwined with the unaltered routine of the Daily Service.

One of my earliest cares was to seek out my pleasant companion and friend of former days, whom I found still unmarried, and no longer young, but kind and agreeable as ever, presiding as mistress of her father's house, and guardian of several younger sisters. From her I anxiously sought for accounts of those in whom I had felt so warm an interest during my first visit to —, and learned what I could not call *sad* tidings, so far as they were concerned, and yet how bitterly did I weep over them!

The long-severed were united at last!—parents and children, brothers and sisters, and those even more tenderly attached, the husband and wife, whose brief day of wedded love had been followed by so dark a night of sorrow—all were now restored to each other, their days of mourning were ended, and the last of the Stanleys had entered into rest. And who was *the last*? On which of those gentle beings had that dread doom been laid?—

“ To be
The last leaf which by Heaven’s decree,
Must hang upon a blasted tree? ”

It was on Marion; on that clinging, loving, trusting heart. She, in the inscrutable decree of Providence, willing, doubtless, to perfect her faith through the sore tribulation of losing her last earthly prop and stay, was for five years left alone. When I heard this, she had been upwards of a twelvemonth in her grave, and the death

of her sister had preceded hers by that length of time. Jane's last illness was a brief one—an attack of fever, which at the end of ten days terminated fatally. Her last hours, during which her mind was perfectly collected, and her bodily suffering at an end, were a meet close for such a life, hallowed by the faith, the hope, which on the threshold of eternity, realized the unseen things of heaven, and rendered her deathbed in very deed the gate of life.

At her own request, Marion and she were for a long while left alone together the day before she died. The particulars of that last solemn interview none ever heard; but its hallowing influence remained to calm the agony of her for whom, from that time forth, there were to be no more hours of confidence, no more unrestrained outpourings of the heart, who had no one left on earth with whom to recall the short-lived joys and long sorrows of the past.

It was Marion's hand that closed the eyes which so long had beamed upon her path with more than a sister's love, and Marion's voice which, when the last struggle was over, found strength to ejaculate, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." She even learned to be thankful that Jane, who had suffered so much and so long, had been spared the utter solitude of heart in which her own life was doomed to close.

After a time, when she overcame the agonizing feelings which caused her to shrink at first with terror from the thought of going out *alone*, Marion's constant walk, so long as her strength continued equal to it, was to Helmsley Church, the resting-place of those whom she had loved so dearly. The Stanley family were buried in a vault beneath the church, which contained within its walls several altar-tombs, and other ancient monuments of the race ; and outside, many inscriptions of later date ; amongst which

were two white marble monuments, one erected to the memory of the late Mr. Stanley, by his daughters, the other to that of Arthur, whose remains were mouldering so far from his kindred dust, by his widow.

There were besides, one whose simple and pathetic inscription recorded the untimely fate of Frederick ; and a little tablet, bearing the name of " Arthur, infant son of Arthur and Marion Stanley." The last of all was inscribed with those of Lucy and of Jane, with a space left beneath, destined one day to be filled up with hers, the one survivor.

Here she would sit for hours, beneath one of the fine yews, which ornament that beautiful old churchyard, gazing upon these beloved names, and feeling, doubtless, more of companionship in the neighbourhood of the dead, than remained for her amongst the living ; for she had not one link left to the days of old. Dr. Willis, that invaluable

friend, had been some years dead ; and in a corner of the churchyard, not far from her usual seat, two head-stones, of different dates, recorded the virtues and faithful servitude of the good old housekeeper, and of Jones, the latter of whom had died under her roof a couple of years before, having long survived Mrs. Peters.

It had been the care of herself and Jane to erect these memorials of their grateful remembrance of those humble friends, for whose loss they felt—and justly felt—that they could never in this world find compensation.

Marion's last walk was to the Hall. That beloved place had been for ten years past closed to her and her sister, having been let on lease during that period to a family who resided there constantly. But during the last summer of her life they left it, and the agent of its worthless owner, now naturalized in Italy by the pressure of debts

which rendered his return home impossible, had not as yet succeeded in finding another tenant. Thus Marion found herself once more at liberty to resume those visits to it, their enforced deprivation of which had been so severely felt by both during the last years of Jane's life. The one to which I have alluded was on a beautiful day in the month of June, nearly the whole of which she spent in the house and grounds; and she was observed sitting for a long while beneath the acacia near the lake. My informant paid her a visit the following day, when she told her where she had been, and dwelt upon the strange mixture of pleasure and of pain with which she had found herself there once more. She spoke of Jane, too, of Lucy, of Arthur, and of the old days of Helmsley Hall.

"It was long," she said, "long ere I could utter those names after dear Jane was called away, but of late I have felt less of

pain than of comfort in speaking of them to you, who knew and loved them all. It is now within a few days of twenty years since Arthur died. *Twenty years!* What should I once have thought—with what horror should I have deprecated the idea—had any one told me that twenty years after that day of anguish I should be alive to talk of it! Yes, and alive as I am—*alone*. I thought I could not survive him. I prayed, in my first wild despair, that I might not; but grief does not kill. Yet it is well that we do not know the path that lies before us.”

My friend said something of the long years of suffering which she must have endured.

“Yes,” replied Marion, “God alone knows the bitterness of my sorrow, and the struggles of my heart ere it could learn submission. But, dearest friend, I should be ungrateful indeed if I were to say that I

have had nothing but sorrow. The trials that come direct from the hand of God, if they be taken in a right spirit, bring in time their own consolation with them. I can fancy trials that make far less of outward show—those inflicted by man on man—far far more difficult to endure than mine. My own dear Jane's lot was a more bitter one; and yet mine was obvious to the eyes of all; while few were aware how every after affliction to her was darkened and deepened by the remembrance of the first; how the cruel, withering disappointment of her early hopes would have blighted every joy, as it gave poignancy to every sorrow. Yet how nobly, how patiently she bore it all. How often I have felt rebuked by her meek endurance! As for me, if there have been hours—and many there have been—when I have thought I could not live, could not bear the light of day, deprived of that perfect love which once was all my own, these

agonizing struggles have passed away, they have long been over, but the memory of that love abides with me; it cannot die. To think how I *have been loved*—to recall nothing, nothing of my short term of wedded life but affection, kindness, tenderness, not a harsh word, not an angry feeling; to think that it passed away from me untainted by one circumstance that could mingle bitterness with the remembrance of it—this is surely joy blended with sorrow, for I can think of that love as living still, and again to be my own where there are no more partings, and where I might never have had hope to arrive but for the sharp trials that first led my heart away from earth. And now that earth is to me a desert; its solitude seems to draw me into closer communion with that world beyond the grave.”

The twentieth anniversary of Arthur's death arrived—a day of brightness and

beauty, recalling faint images of that whose gorgeous glories had been poured in vain on his desolated dwelling; and Marion, as was her unfailing custom, attended at morning service in the Cathedral, on her return from which she retired, as she was always wont to do upon such anniversaries—of which she had many to observe—to pass the forenoon in her own apartment. Some hours after, her maid, having occasion to deliver a message, knocked at her door, and receiving no reply, repeated the summons several times, still in vain; then becoming alarmed, gently opened it and entered. Her mistress was seated in a chair, whose back was towards the door, and on a small table beside it were her Prayer-book—which had been her husband's—his miniature, a paper containing the rich, brown, glossy curls which had been cut from his head that day twenty years ago, another which held the silky locks that Marion's own hand had shorn from the

brow of her dead baby ere she laid him in his coffin, and the withered acacia leaves plucked by herself and Arthur before they sailed for India. Her hand rested on Arthur's picture, and a stillness, a rigidity in her motionless attitude, alarmed the affectionate servant, who hastily advanced. One glance confirmed her fears. Marion leant back in her chair, a smile of the most ineffable peace lingering on her lips, but the eyes were fixed, the hand cold as marble. The spirit, long prepared for the last dread hour, had been thus gently, thus painlessly summoned to depart; the ransomed one was with her God, the last wanderer of the flock had gained the fold—the parted had met again!

She was laid in the vault at Helmsley Church, and in pursuance of her own directions, contained in a written paper found in her desk, the acacia leaves, and the picture of Arthur, together with his hair and that

of her child, were placed beside her in her coffin—memorials of a love stronger than death.

“They sin who tell us love can die.”

FINIS.

ALLAN M'TAVISH'S FISHING.



ALLAN M'TAVISH'S FISHING.

Why cross the gloomy firth to-day?

* * * * *

The blackening wave is edged with white,

To inch and rock the sea-mews fly ;

The fishers have heard the Water-sprite,

Whose screams forbode that wreck is nigh.

Lay of the Last Minstrel.

IN a secluded nook of one of the wildest and most solitary parts of the Argyllshire coast, where it is washed by the Atlantic waters, there stood some thirty years ago the cottage of a Highland fisherman. The traveller who should now look for its site, would probably be unrewarded for his pains;—it has long since mouldered from

the face of the earth. A few stones, half buried among sand, are all that remain to indicate where the humble dwelling of human hearts once sanctified the bosom of solitude;—yet were its walls the mute witnesses of love as deep—of agony as intense—as ever lived and burned within the soul beneath the roofs of palaces. Nature is no respecter of places. The passions, which obey her call, belong alike to all her children; the decay which follows her footsteps, is the appointed lot of all things wherein these children have a part here below.

At the period of which I speak, the cottage stood at the very base of a range of lofty and precipitous cliffs, which, retiring in a semicircle from the shore at that particular spot, left a recess at their feet, whose only opening was to the sea. This little nook, not more than half an acre in extent was during high water entirely separated from communication with the world beyond

it, as the sea flowed up to the base of the rocky walls which, girding it on either side, extended themselves along the coast. The only mode by which it was at such times possible to obtain egress from it, was one accessible to no foot, save that of a daring and fearless craigsman, that of scrambling on hands and knees across the face of the rocks, which, beetling over a sea so high and tempestuous, looked as though they defied the pigmy efforts of man to surmount their mighty rampart. Yet this feat, frightful as it would have appeared to one unaccustomed to it, had more than once been accomplished by the bold and sure-footed inhabitants of the coast, by means of strong wooden poles, ropes to aid their descent, and a judicious method of availing themselves of every projecting bush, or tuft of heather, to assist their toilsome progress. At ebb tide, a narrow strip of sand, turning the projecting headlands, afforded a path whereby to gain

the wider extent of shore beyond them, some three-quarters of a mile along which was situated a row of fishermen's cottages.

The solitary cabin above-mentioned stood aloof and secluded from all, yet wearing a character very superior to that of the others. Its appearance, in fact, was nearer that of the neat and carefully-kept abodes of the peasantry on a Lowland gentleman's estate, than the slovenly hut of a Northern fisherman. Some pains had been taken to form a little garden beside it, at the sheltering foot of the cliff; and these pains—screened as it was from all high winds, even from those blowing off the sea, at least in ordinary weather—had been attended with considerable success. Every thing around the door was kept in extreme order; and the narrow strip of grass on which the sand had not encroached, served as a little bleaching-green to the fisherman's young and lovely Lowland wife, on which she was

often to be seen spreading out her clothes, with her baby laid upon the grass beside her, while awaiting the return of her husband from his fishing; at which time it was her usual custom to repair to the beach, in order to assist him in carrying up his nets to the house.

Allan MacTavish, her husband, was a tall and handsome young Highlander, who had, about two years previous to the time of which I write, arrived in that part of the country to settle, with his newly-married wife. He was a native of the coast, and had been bred a fisherman from childhood; but some time before his marriage he had left the country, to accompany his foster-brother, a young Highland gentleman, to the Bridge of Allan, a watering-place in Stirlingshire, whither he had been ordered for his health. The young laird's affection for his foster-brother was such that he could not endure to be separated from him, and

Allan left his fishing to go with him. The laird returned no more; he died in the Lowlands; but Allan MacTavish came back, enriched by a small legacy from him, and accompanied by one of the prettiest girls in all Stirlingshire as his wife. From that time they had continued to reside in the Cove of Craignavarroch, as the spot where their cottage stood was named, to all appearance the happiest of couples. They were doatingly attached to each other; and when, on returning from his fishing, Allan MacTavish sat down beside his clean and cheerful hearth, with his infant on his knee, while his wife spun, or mended his nets beside him, he at least felt that the world did not contain for him a spot so blessed as his own little home.

But there was one heart in the group that felt as though it dared not be happy. Margaret Weir, the young wife of Allan, loved her husband with a depth and intensity of

affection which had led her to do as she had done—to violate filial duty for his sake ; but which could not teach her to forget the fault she had committed, or the parent whom she had deserted ; and the consciousness of her disobedience was with her in her happiest hour, to sink her heart as with a weight of lead. She was the only child of a wealthy farmer, originally from Ayrshire, who had come, during his daughter's childhood, immediately after the death of his wife, to settle in Stirlingshire, not far from the Bridge of Allan.

Andrew Weir was one of those who still retain, almost in all their original strictness, the peculiar tenets and ideas of the Cameromians ; of whom there are many to be found at the present day in the wild and lonely districts of the south-western part of Scotland. His notions of family discipline, and of strict seclusion from those who held a different doctrine from his own, were ex-

tremely rigid ;—yet, notwithstanding these, the affection which he had borne his daughter was very great,—nor had the harmony subsisting between them ever experienced any interruption, until the arrival of Allan MacTavish near their place of residence, and his subsequent acquaintance with Margaret, first broke in upon the calm tenor of her life, by introducing sensations to which her heart had never before been awakened.

The intimacy of his daughter with the young Highlander had continued for a considerable time ere Andrew Weir became aware of it ; for Margaret knew her father's prejudices too well to dare make him acquainted with her lover. It came to his knowledge by accident, and his anger was proportionably great. In common with many of his countrymen, Andrew entertained an extreme dislike to Highlanders, which dislike, in the present instance, received tenfold confirmation from the circum-

stance of MacTavish being a Papist. He would have considered himself as signing the warrant for his daughter's eternal perdition, had he not instantly forbidden all intercourse between them.

At this juncture Allan's foster-brother died, and left him the legacy already mentioned; but with his death, at the same time, ceased all the reasons for the young man's remaining absent from his own country. He contrived an interview with Margaret ere he should depart. It is needless to linger on an oft-told tale. The struggle between filial affection and all-powerful love in the heart of the unsophisticated girl, was severe and long continued; while the religious feelings in which she had been educated contributed to swell the amount of reluctance and of terror with which she contemplated the step to which she was urged. But love at last prevailed. Margaret fled from her father's house with her lover.

They instantly proceeded to Edinburgh,

where they were married by a Romish priest; and then sought the lonely solitudes of Allan's old Argyllshire mountains. But Margaret,—so strict had been the filial obedience in which she was brought up, so severe the religious faith of her youth,—could not find happiness the portion of her married life, notwithstanding all the kindness of her husband, the loveliness of her infant, and the peacefulness of her home. The image of her grey-haired father going down in his sorrow to a lonely grave, mourning, in bitterness of heart, the sin and the falling-away of his only child, was ever before her eyes.

She concealed from her husband the remorse which embittered her happiness; but often, when his boat was on the sea, and she was alone in her little dwelling with her infant,—not a sight or a sound of a human being near,—nothing but the sea birds screaming from the cliffs, and the sea

making wild music to their song, as it plashed and roared against the rocks that shut out the cove from the world—often at such an hour, would Margaret look back to the image of the cheerful farmhouse in the green sunny holm by Allan Water;—to the blazing ingle by whose side stood her old father's chair;—to the venerable form of that now forsaken father, as he opened “the big Ha' Bible,” to begin the evening worship, while she sat by his side, and the farm servants formed a circle around.

Alas ! her accustomed seat was empty now. The name of the undutiful daughter was heard no more in the dwelling of her childhood. Had she indeed still a father? or had her guilty desertion not broken his heart and sent him to a death-bed which no filial hand had smoothed? Then would she press her baby to her heart, while the tears of bitter and fruitless penitence fell on its innocent face, and pray to God that her sin

might not be visited on it ; nor be punished in her own person by a like instance of ingratitude in her own child.

The return of her beloved husband might for a time dispel these miserable thoughts ; but still they came again when he left her, sometimes even when he was by her side. And when, as often happened, his boat was out in rough and tempestuous weather, the anxiety and the terror of poor Margaret were indeed terrible. She seemed ever haunted by some mysterious dread of punishment through the means of her warmest affections—her husband or her child.

There came a bright sunny day in April, when the sun set calmly and cloudlessly, leaving a long train of light over the sea. Allan MacTavish went to bed at sunset, bidding his wife awake him at eleven at night. It would be high tide in about an hour after that time when his boat would be most easily floated off ; and he, in company

with the fishermen, who lived in the huts already mentioned, farther along the coast, were then to depart for their deep sea fishing. Margaret determined accordingly to sit up until that hour, in order to obviate any danger of not waking in proper time, had she laid down to sleep. But as the night darkened in, and all became stillness and silence in the cottage, an unwonted drowsiness crept over her ; in spite of all her efforts her eyes closed — thoughts wavered before her mind in confused and shapeless forms, till they gradually melted away into dreams ; and leaning her head upon a chair beside the low stool on which she had seated herself, she sank into a profound sleep.

When at last she opened her eyes, which was with a sudden start, she perceived her husband standing on the floor, and nearly dressed. Casting her eyes towards a silver watch (the gift of Allan's foster-brother), which hung upon the wall, she perceived by

the fire-light that it was after eleven; and hastily rose from her seat, in that confusion of ideas which attends a hurried awakening from sleep.

"Margaret, dear," said her husband kindly, "what for did ye stay out of bed? I never knew it till I wakened, and saw ye sleeping there."

"Have I no' been i' my bed," exclaimed Margaret, as she looked around her. "Ou, ay, I mind it, a' noo. I just fell asleep sittin' aside the fire. An', Allan, whar are ye gaun e'en noo?"

"Where am I gaun?" returned Allan. "Where would I be gaun? Ye're no awake yet, Margaret, dear. I'm for the boat, lass."

"The boat!" almost shrieked Margaret, as the recollection seemed to rush upon her; "the boat!—Oh no, Allan, ye maunna' gang the nicht! No the nicht, Allan. Ye maunna' gang!"

"Not gang to night!" exclaimed he in

astonishment. "And what for no?—I must gang in half an hour's time. And gang ye to your bed, hinny, and tak a sleep."

"Oh, Allan," said Margaret, bursting into tears, "be guided by me, and tak na the boat the nicht, or we'se a' rue it."

"What's the matter, Margaret!" anxiously inquired he. "What's pitten that in yer head?"

"I had a dream e'en now, Allan," sobbed Margaret, "that warned me no to let ye gang. I fell asleep, and I dreamed that I was sittin' here, i' the ingle-neuk, an' waitin' till it was time to wauken ye for the fishin', an' on a sudden the door opened, and myauld faither cam ben, and stood afore me; there whar you're stannin', Allan. An' I thoct he leukit gay an' stern-ways at me; an' says he, 'Margaret,' says he, 'tell your husband to bide at hame the nicht, and no gang to the fishin', or ye'll may be rue it when ye canna' mend it.' And wi' that he turned roun',

and gaed awa' again, or ever I had poerer to speak till him ; an' I startit up, and waukenet wi' the fricht. But oh, Allan!" and Margaret burst into a flood of weeping: "it's no for nocht that I have seen the auld man this nicht. Be ruled by the warnin' he gie'd me, and dinna gang to the fishin'."

"Hoots, bairn," exclaimed her husband, "your father liked na' me. It was mair like he wad warn ye no' to let me gang to hinder me from some good than from ill. No, no, Margaret dear, gang I must, this night."

Margaret again wept, wrung her hands, and implored her husband not to go. But superstitious as every Highlander is, on this night his wife's mysterious dream made no impression upon Allan MacTavish. His spirits, on the contrary, had seldom seemed so high or so excited. He led Margaret to the door ;—shewed her the calm, clear sky, brilliant with stars, and the full spring-tide coming so tranquilly into the little bay ;—

asked her with a kiss, if this were a night to let a dream frighten him from his fishing; and without awaiting farther remonstrance, strode to the place where his boat was moored; and as he pushed it from the shore, turned his head, once more to utter a light and laughing farewell. "Gang to your bed, my bonny Peggy," he said, "and be up belyve the morn, to see the grand boat load o' fish that I'll bring ye back."

Margaret stood upon the shore and watched his boat as it doubled the headland, until, through the darkness, her straining eye could no longer discern it; heedless the while of the still advancing tide that now laved her feet. She dried her tears, and looked up to the calm heaven, where not a cloud obscured the dark-blue bosom of night; till at last, half re-assured by her husband's cheerful anticipations, half cheered by the serene aspect of the weather, she returned to the cottage, and after commending him in a

fervent prayer to the protection of Heaven, she replenished the fire with peats, and lay down beside her child, where, in a short time, she fell into a tranquil sleep.

How long Margaret had slept she knew not; but it could not have been very long, for, except the fitful flashes of the fire-light, all was darkness in the cottage, when she was suddenly awakened by a loud and prolonged sound. She started up in bed, and listened, in an agony of apprehension that almost froze the blood in her veins. It was no dream,—no delusion,—she distinctly heard the loud wild howling of the awakened blast, raging overhead as though it would tear off the very roof of the cottage, and scatter it in its fury. She had sunk to sleep when all was stillness on earth and in heaven. She awoke to a tumult as awful, as though all the winds had at once been set free from their cave, and dispatched to waste their wrath upon the vexed bosom of the sea.

But, deeper and more awful than the winds, there came another sound—the raging of the waters, as they rose in their might, and dashed themselves with a loud booming roar upon the cliffs. Margaret sprang from her bed, and undressed as she was, rushed to the cottage door. The instant she raised the latch, the force of the tempest dashed it open against the wall. She looked out into the night. A pitchy darkness now brooded over all things ; every star seemed blotted from the face of heaven ; but dimly through the gloom she could descry the white crests of the waves, as they surged and lashed the beach within a few yards of the cottage door. The tide had risen to a height almost unexampled on that coast, beneath the influence of a vernal storm ; it had far overpassed its usual limits within the Cove of Craignavarroch ; and on the rocks, beyond which it could not go, it was breaking high, —high over head,—with a noise like

thunder. Never was change in the weather more sudden and more complete. Margaret stood for a moment in speechless horror and dismay; then, rushing back into the cottage, she fell upon her knees, and held up her hands to heaven: "Lord God!" she exclaimed—"have mercy! have mercy!" She could not utter another word. She hid her face in her hands, and sobbed in agony.

Still the tempest raged, and the waves roared on. Margaret dressed herself, and carefully covered her infant, whose sweet sleep was unbroken by the fearful tumult. Again she went to the door, and stood, looking into the night, regardless of the wind, which drove a heavy rain against her face. she strained her ears to distinguish some sound—some cry—amid the pauses of the hurricane. As well might she have striven to distinguish the low music of the woodland bird, as the wildest shriek that ever broke from the lips of despair and anguish, in the

midst of an uproar of the elements like that through which she had dreamt of hearing it. But those from whom that sound must have come, were far—far beyond where her ear could catch their voices.

She closed the door, returned into the room, and knelt down again on the floor, burying her face and closing her ears, as if to shut out the noise of the tempest; while her whole frame shook with the gasping sobs which brought no tears to relieve her: and at every fresh howl of the blast, she shuddered and her limbs shrank closer together. She tried to pray—but the words died upon her lips. She could not speak;—she could not even think;—she only felt as though she were all one nerve—one thrilling nerve—quivering beneath repeated and torturing pangs.

On a sudden the wind sunk—completely sunk. For the space of three minutes there was not a breath heard to blow. Margaret

raised her head, and listened. All was still. She was about to spring from the ground, when back—back it came again—the hideous burst—the roaring bellow of the augmented hurricane, as though it had gained strength and fierceness from its brief repose! Back it came—shaking the very cottage walls, and rattling the door and little window as if it would burst them open—and Margaret flung herself forward again with a wild shriek, and clasped her hands over her ears again, to deaden the sound.

Then she started from the ground, as a thought struck her, which seemed to bring some faint gleam of hope. “I kenna whan the storm began,” said she to herself. “He may never hae won farrer nor the houses ayont the craigs yonder;—or they may hae pitten back in time to get ashore there; and he’ll be bidin’ the mornin’s licht, and the fa’in’ o’ the wind, or he come back here again. Oh ay, that’ll just be it! Surely—surely

that'll be it," she repeated, as if to assure herself of the truth of what she said. She took down the watch from the nail on which it hung, and looked at it by the fire-light. The hand pointed to half-past two. "Oh! will it never be day?—will it never be licht again?" she exclaimed, as she replaced it, "that I may win yont the craigs, and see gin he be there." She went again to the door. All was darkness still, and wild uproar without. No gleam of light to announce the far distant dawn. A fresh burst of wind drove her back. "Oh!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands; "oh! gin he had been advised by me! But the dochter that left her faither's grey hairs to mourn her, deserves na' a better lot. It was e'en owre muckle guidness to gie me a warnin' o' it.

The long dark hours of that terrible night dragged on—on—in all the torments, the unutterable torments of suspense. And if

anything can aggravate these torments, it is enduring them amid darkness. There is something awfully indefinite at all times in the thick impenetrable gloom of night; but when that gloom is armed with terrors, and big with dangers, to which the very impossibility of ascertaining their extent adds tenfold in the imagination, then it is that we truly feel the full amount of its awfulness. At last a faint dim glimmer of grey light began to break over the tumbling waves. Again Margaret was at her cottage door. It was barely light enough to shew her how mountainous were the billows that dashed and raved upon the shore,—how thick and heavy were the clouds that darkened the sky. The wind howled with unabated fury, and the rain drove against her by fits. She could just discern, by the faint day-break, the white foam that marked the top of the waves, which were now ebbing from the bay; while

a thick rib of sand and sea-weed upon the grass not far from the door, marked how fearfully high they had flowed through the night. She cast an eager glance towards the cliffs.—Surely by this time it would be practicable to scramble along their base, and to reach the path on the shore to the fishermen's huts? She felt as though it were impossible to remain another instant in that state of terrible uncertainty. But then, her infant! She durst not carry it out by so hazardous a path, in the wet, cold, dark dawn; and should she leave it behind, it might wake and miss her! She turned distractedly into the room, and approached its bed. It was still in a sound and tranquil sleep; and with a desperate effort of resolution, she determined to make the attempt. She approached the door, and fastened her plaid firmly around her, ere she stepped forth upon her scarce distinguishable way.

At that moment, ere Margaret could cross the threshold, a strange sensation came across her. A cold air rushed past her, like that occasioned by the rapid approach and still more rapid passing of some indiscernible object. A dimness came over her sight; she could not be said to *see*—but she *felt* as if something cold and wet had glided swiftly by her, with a scarcely perceptible contact, into the house. A damp dew overspread her forehead; her limbs trembled and bent beneath her, as she instinctively turned round, and looked into the room which she had quitted

The light was so faint, that, within the house, it scarce vanquished the darkness; but a bright gleam flashing up from the fire, shewed everything in the room distinctly for an instant's space; and, by that gleam, Margaret beheld the figure of her husband standing within the door, pale, as it seemed

to her, and dim, and shadowy, with the water dripping from his clothes and hair. The fire-flash sunk as instantaneously as it had shone, and all again was obscurity, as she dropped upon the floor in a swoon.

When the unhappy wife again opened her eyes, and recovered her perceptions of what was passing around her, she found herself laid in her own bed. The bright glorious sunshine was beaming in at the cottage window, as though to mock her desolation. Several women, from the neighbouring fishing village, were in the room; one of whom held in her arms the infant of Margaret, whom she was endeavouring to sooth and quiet: and at the moment she raised her head, the door opened, and upon the self-same spot where she had that morning beheld his likeness stand, she saw the lifeless corpse of her drowned husband borne in the arms of some of his comrades, who

had with difficulty rescued it from the devouring waves ; yet rescued it too late to save.

Some weeks afterwards, as the household of Andrew Weir were rising from their evening devotions, a gentle knock was heard at the door of the kitchen in which they were all assembled. The old farmer himself went to open it. A female figure, pale, thin, and wasted, clad in deep mourning, and holding an infant in her arms, stood trembling before him. He gazed on her for a moment in silent uncertainty, then desired her to "come in bye."

"Faither," said she, clasping her attenuated hands together, "do ye no ken me?" An electric shock of recognition seemed to run through the old man's frame. He sank

into a chair that stood by the door, and with averted face waved his hand, as though to bid the intruder begone.

"Faither!" she exclaimed, flinging herself on the ground before him, and clasping his knees, "the hand of the Lord has been upon me for my fau't. I cam' back to crave your pardon, or I dee. Oh! dinna cast me aff! I hae been sair chasteesed; sair, sair chasteesed."

A murmur of sympathy and compassion arose from the assembled group of old and attached domestics. The farmer remained silent yet a little space, with his grey head bowed upon his hands, and his whole frame shaking with strong convulsive shudderings. He raised his face at last; and while, every feature working with emotion, he stretched forth his hand to the weeping culprit at his knee—

"Rise Margaret," he said, in a broken

voice, "rise my bairn. The Lord grant ye peace and pardon, as freely as your faither dees the nicht." And the penitent and mourning daughter was clasped once more to her parent's heart.

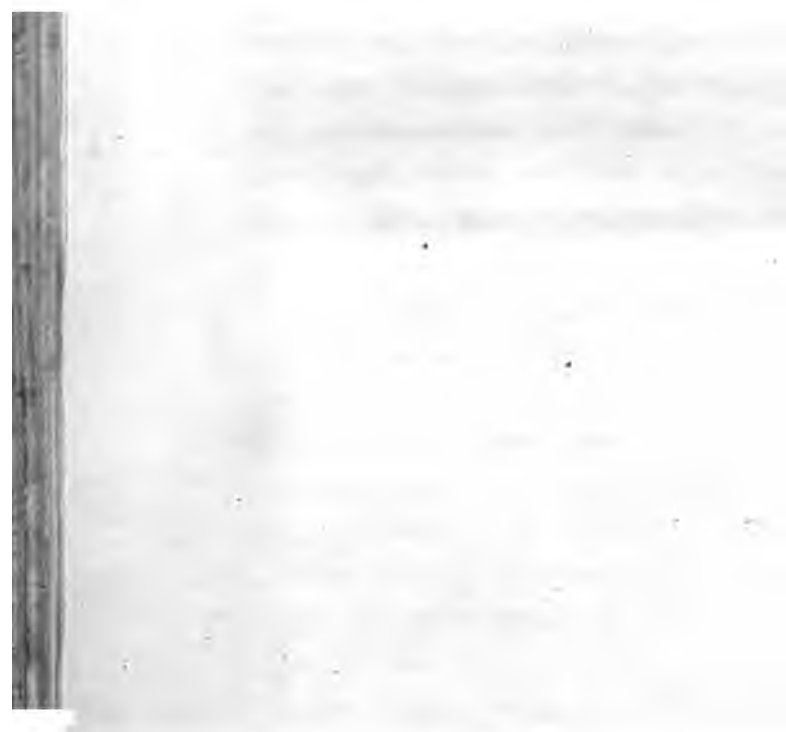
Margaret died not long after in her father's arms, rejoicing with humble faith in her release. The infant son remained with his grandfather; and the cottage which had been the scene of his parents' brief time of wedded love,—of his mother's widowed anguish, was left uninhabited, and speedily fell to decay, which was accelerated by the encroachments of the sea upon the Cove.

Some broken expressions which escaped from Margaret, regarding the apparition seen by her on the morning of her husband's death, being speedily circulated among the inhabitants of the coast, deterred any one from ever attempting again to fix a habitation in the Cove of Craignavarroch.

The place acquired the reputation of being "uncanny;" and at present there are few fishermen who would willingly put in there after nightfall, however rough the sea, and however distant their destined haven. It stands in the solitude and the desolation befitting the theatre of such a tale.

THE END.

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